

[always waiting for you just to cut to the bone](#) by [stardustupinlights](#)

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Characters: Fujiki Yuusaku, Kusanagi Shouichi, Revolver | Kougami Ryouken, Spectre (Yu-Gi-Oh)

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Summary:

"Ryoken is good at keeping secrets. Annoyingly good, in fact, so good that Yusaku has struggled to get any more information about anything outside of the essentials of their plans ever since he joined them. There's something extremely crossed off and private about him that makes him an impenetrable wall. There are no doors on that wall, no windows, no insight into his thoughts or his knowledge or his feelings, and no amount of pushing seems to give. What little he shares is calculated and measured, and there are never unnecessary details unless someone asks him about it, in

which case he doesn't even dwell on those properly. He's more safely guarded than SOL Technologies' database.

Yusaku knows he himself is dry, and secretive, and usually an asshole, but he's nowhere near the level of tight-lipped secrecy that Kogami Ryoken manages. "

Or, a season one au in which Ryoken leaves Hanoi... for Yusaku, mostly. But they don't talk about that.

Relationships: Fujiki Yuusaku/Revolver | Kougami Ryouken

Comments: 26

Kudos: 79

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

- For [Tarashima](#).

ooooohhhh boy oh boy big monster coming. i've been writing this for a few months between everything else going on in my life and it was so much fun. this is a fic i made for Tarashima, who gave me so many ideas that what was estimated to be about maybe ten thousand words turned out to be twenty thousand. two chapters for readability. oof. Celepom, that angel, did me the favor to beta this beast, so please enjoy and give both of them some love. they're amazing.

happy reading, y'all. sorry for no valentine's fic, but, busy mcbusy over here XD hero au coming SOONISH

There's something about living constantly under surveillance, with his every move being undeniably watched by the enemy that is starting to grate on Yusaku's nerves. He would say it's not so different from living in paranoia that someone will kidnap him or try to trick him into a situation that will end up with him locked in a room again, but it's unnerving at best and aggravates his insomnia at worst.

He knows he's being watched at school. He knows his home is wired. He knows that any second now someone could attack him and actually make all those fears he's carried since childhood a reality. It's completely different to be paranoid and actually *knowing*. It's not just his PTSD making him jumpy and alert at all times.

And at this point - three months into this - a part of him is tempted to confront them, because he really can't stand pretending to sleep for much longer. He considered getting sleeping pills, but then he could be attacked while under their influence, so he decided not to. He's been wanting to get this done for a while, of course, and has been trying to patiently wait, but he got some rather *unpleasant* news about the subject just a few minutes ago, from the mouth of Kogami Ryoken himself, former enemy and voice of

hope, who didn't even dignify his protests at them with more than a look before going back to checking the hotdog truck for bugs.

To his left, leaning against the desk and watching Ryoken work, Kusanagi-san shoots him an understanding smile, brimming with awkwardness, but Yusaku doesn't feel reassured. If anything, he gets angrier, though not at him. He's always angry and restless these days, and only part of it is due to insomnia. The rest is purely because of their slow progress regarding their current situation. Even though he understands *why* it's slow, and other inconveniences and surprises that he isn't fond of that Ryoken hits him with, like it's the case for today. They have a plan, yes— but Ryoken has refused to move or talk or evolve much *beyond* just strategy and has kept essential details from them

It's not until maybe ten minutes after Yusaku tries to make obvious how annoyed he is that Ryoken declares the truck free of invasive surveillance, his voice cold. "I checked under it earlier today, so everything should be ready to go now."

Something about it makes Yusaku's insides *hurt*, in a way that he can't quite explain, but it also makes him feel warm when Ryoken directs the intensity of his cool gaze at him. A dangerous contrast, yet weirdly intoxicating. "Right."

They stare at each other for probably a bit too long, because Kusanagi-san breaks the ice.

"So, does anybody want some coffee?" He asks, but it's a bit forced, uncomfortable, which Yusaku can't blame him for, but he also doesn't really care. He only nods in answer, watching as Ryoken sits down, all long graceful limbs and strong shoulders squared and tense, as they have been for weeks now. Yusaku hasn't seen him relax once since he met him in person. It's like he lives in a constant state of vigilance. Yusaku can even relate. "It's bound to be a long night."

Yusaku crosses his arms and looks away from them both, staring at his VR Room and mumbling under his breath. He tries not to let his thoughts spiral downwards, even though he knows it's futile. "What an understatement."

He knows it's childish. He's aware that he looks like a teenager having a tantrum – which he is – but as of late Yusaku feels like he should at least be able to let his frustration be known to his companions, otherwise he fears that Ryoken will forget that they still have their own private business to discuss. Despite knowing how impossible that must be when they stare each other down every single day.

The last three months have been wild. First, there was the Tower of Hanoi, but that seemed terribly unimportant now, at least compared to how it felt when it was still looming over them. The hours leading up to it being completed were absolutely terrifying, but it all came to a screeching halt when the Tower just stopped about a third of the way up, after his Speed Duel with Ryoken and the discovery that the bastard that made all of this happen was, indeed, alive and well (relatively speaking). It was a revelation that left him feeling empty inside, and then angry beyond belief, but it was all quickly replaced with the overwhelming feeling of happiness and relief at learning who Revolver truly was.

Yusaku can barely process what happened between him waking up from the shock of their tie, rushing to Stardust Road, his heart racing with the confirmation of his suspicions about Revolver, and their arrival to the mansion, to the deactivated Tower. To this day, Ryoken refused to make it clear for them instead of making it sound cryptic, as if they didn't have a right to the details. He had promised to explain when they weren't in such a compromising position, given the current surveillance they were under and the programs they were developing, but that proved to take longer than expected, *and* longer than Yusaku's patience could handle. Ryoken might be his voice of hope, but he was also annoyingly stubborn in regards to several different subjects. Yusaku would be even angrier about it if he wasn't exactly the same way.

He can respect his privacy in regards to whatever words he exchanged with his father, but he can't exactly be blamed for wondering why Kogami Kiyoshi is still alive, why the Tower of Hanoi just *dropped* like it was inconsequential, and why Ryoken decided to join them. He was ecstatic for about thirty seconds – longer, if he was being honest – and then the realization that this meant he was going to be chased every waking moment

of his life hit him like a truck and the questions started pouring out of his mouth as Kusanagi-san drove away from the mansion under Ryoken's insistence and Spectre's unnerving gaze.

There was, understandably, an argument before and after the four of them got into the truck, and it wasn't exactly *civil*. Spectre barely participated, all too happy to watch from the sidelines, while Kusanagi-san let anger get the best of him and Yusaku struggled to keep everyone in check. Ryoken took the abuse like a champ but didn't allow himself be aggressively chewed out either; Yusaku cringes just remembering every word exchanged, especially those that he was able to have with Ryoken himself that weren't exactly *kind*, but that day was extreme and both he and Kusanagi-san were incredibly lost. They sort of still are, in a different way.

He learned that there isn't exactly a deactivation code for the Tower that isn't put into motion through a duel, but Ryoken managed to put it into hibernation with an override code. SOL Technologies is still trying to get rid of it, to no avail, which might put a wedge in their plans to claim Link VRAINS is safer than ever on reopening day. The tower was still there, lurking, though no one that was absorbed by it seemed to be suffering from any side effects after waking up, to the relief of pretty much everyone involved, including, Yusaku thinks, Ryoken. He's given enough hints that he didn't exactly approve of the idea of ending humanity's evolution through the death of technology, but he's not shared any personal thoughts about it, except for throwaway lines.

Other than that, nothing is new, yet everything is different. Ryoken put them up to the task of formulating a plan to infiltrate Hanoi's Link VRAINS' quarters from the outside, without having to log in, through good-old-fashioned hacking, but the surveillance made the development of it even more difficult. He made it clear they were being followed a couple weeks into their alliance, but at least the reason as to *why* they're being chased is quite obvious, considering Ai's current predicament of being locked up inside a safe under Kusanagi-san's desk. Only Yusaku knows the password, and he didn't bother to memorize it's entirely just in case; he hides the scrap of paper he wrote it down in the bottom of Shima's schoolbag, because he never cleans those pieces, and there's another copy written on an

old school Duel Monsters card that could almost be mistaken for a production code.

There's one other thing that Yusaku has discovered, but he was hesitant to group this with everything else he's learned, because while it is relevant to the changes in his life it's also rather... personal.

Ryoken is good at keeping secrets. Annoyingly good, in fact, so good that Yusaku has struggled to get any more information about anything outside of the essentials of their plans ever since he joined them. There's something extremely closed off and private about him that makes him an impenetrable wall. There are no doors on that wall, no windows, no insight into his thoughts or his knowledge or his feelings, and no amount of pushing seems to give. What little he shares is calculated and measured, and there are never unnecessary details unless someone asks him about it, in which case he doesn't even dwell on those properly. He's more safely guarded than SOL Technologies' database.

Yusaku knows he himself is dry, and secretive, and usually an asshole, but he's nowhere near the level of tight-lipped secrecy that Kogami Ryoken manages.

This, of course, means that more often than not they fail at having conversations without them turning into arguments. They *do* achieve it sometimes, and even have peaceful moments together, but other than that all they do is argue, and debate, and discuss, and as much as it is exhausting, it's also weirdly exhilarating to discover that Ryoken can meet him head on in everything, that they keep falling apart and together and against each other every time they speak. And Ryoken has such a smart and quick tongue as well; it's starting to make Yusaku's dreams about his voice of hope take rather inappropriate turns, but he hasn't decided whether that makes him uncomfortable or even more eager to know what's inside Ryoken's head.

He always knew he was going to have strong feelings about whoever his voice of hope belonged to, but he wasn't quite expecting *this*. Maybe if Ryoken wasn't as breathtakingly brilliant Yusaku wouldn't feel quite like he does, but what's done is done and Ryoken will eventually have to deal with

the fact that Yusaku will not let him go now that he's found him, unless that's what he truly desires.

Which he *hopes* is not the case.

Back in the present, outside of Yusaku's hopelessly spiraling thoughts, Ryoken gives Kusanagi-san his own nod, respectful and infuriatingly kind, considering how much of an asshole he could be when he opened his mouth. Yusaku stares at him from the corner of his eye and Ryoken notices, raising an eyebrow at him.

Yusaku's always staring at him. He knows Ryoken knows this, but he wonders if Ryoken knows *why* outside of their constant fight for him to fucking open up. He wonders if he knows he's a sight for sore eyes, and that the way he moves is absolutely hypnotizing, that there's not a thing about him that doesn't seem like a confirmation that angels walk the earth too, and if he's aware that Yusaku might be falling a little bit in love, despite everything.

Ryoken tilts his head at him, since Yusaku is still watching, but he still says nothing. If only for a little while, Yusaku wants to pretend that he's not angry at him right now for *several* reasons, and that Ryoken doesn't look at him like just another victim. That would be nice for a change.

"When is Spectre getting here?" Kusanagi-san asks, the smell of coffee filling the truck. Yusaku turns his eyes towards him and watches him dump three spoonfuls of sugar into Ryoken's coffee feeling amused and disgusted. It's proof that it's been three months of Ryoken inserting himself into their lives and basically taking over Café Nagi; Kusanagi-san never sells as much in one day as he does when Ryoken takes over the grill. It's embarrassingly obvious his looks and how he genuinely enjoys the food attracts more clients than Yusaku's thousand yard stare.

Yusaku's still admittedly confused about Ryoken deciding that the best way of making it less weird that he's suddenly hanging around them all the time is working the truck. He guesses it makes sense for outsiders, if you ignore that Kusanagi-san never even put up a sign that he was looking for more help with the truck, and the fact that Ryoken is clearly richer than anyone

else they've ever met, made evident just by looking at the tags of his clothes and those fancy sleek sunglasses he wears sometimes.

Ryoken looks good in an apron, too, and a loose thin shirt that's just a couple shades of pink darker than the one he wore when Yusaku met him face to face, and jeans. He looks good no matter what he does, actually, even if he has grease all over his face and smells of fried onions. It's infuriating, as are most things about him.

"He should be here in about ten minutes. If he's not, then we're leaving without him," Ryoken answers easily enough, taking the cup Kusanagi-san offers him with another thankful nod. He doesn't seem to show any remorse over the idea of leaving Spectre behind, so Yusaku can only guess that Spectre is aware he might be dumped. "Do you need to go over our plan again?"

Yusaku wants to say no, but he knows they should probably go over the details, considering he himself only knows the reason behind what they're doing, and not how they're going to keep everything in order, or where they're going. He's still too angry about not being told about this beforehand, but he has had *some* of his questions answered when he arrived and found a duffel bag full of his stuff.

It's simple, as far as he understands. Getting out of Den City into less populated, and technology dominated areas for a while will help them not only to relax, but also make it harder for their enemies to maintain constant surveillance on them. The truck, as proven by Ryoken, is not bugged, and the computers are all unplugged and ready to be moved, as well as the VR Room. The Wi-Fi, to the chagrin of some customers, has been off for about a week, and all their phones are locked up inside a drawer, their batteries pulled out and SIM cards hidden somewhere in whatever place Ryoken's staying at, which did free Yusaku from Shima's incessant texting for a while.

Ryoken's Duel Disk is nowhere in sight today, his wrist bare, which means either Spectre has it or it's in his bag. Yusaku's is untraceable already, and guarding Ai, so they're virtually untraceable, unless they're actively followed by car or foot.

Ryoken personally went over to his place while he was at school to make sure to deactivate the bugs for just long enough for him to be able to pack Yusaku's bag, which was an embarrassing breach of privacy and one of the reasons he was angry with him right now, but he was at least thankful for the fact that he didn't have to do it himself under his watchful gaze. He's more concerned about whether Ryoken packed all the right things or not, but he's too nervous to check in front of everyone. He'll chew him out about it later, in private, when he gets a chance.

Kusanagi-san also confirmed that there should be no way to tell he disabled in his own apartment to pack himself, but there are no such reassurances from Ryoken. They have no idea where he and Spectre are staying, or if they're even staying together, so no one should know that they're leaving town. It was easy enough to convince Shima he was sick and staying with some non-existent relatives.

Kusanagi-san shrugs though, clearly already knowing how this is going to work because he's the main driver, after all – Yusaku's admittedly scared shitless at the idea of Ryoken taking over the wheel at some point, not out a lack of trust, but he saw the twinkle in Spectre's eye when Ryoken mentioned at some point he could drive, and he didn't like it – so Yusaku has to swallow his pride and nod at Ryoken.

It gets him another eyebrow raise, but Yusaku offers him no other response whatsoever.

“We'll be heading towards the coast, closer to small fishing towns and old-school temples and shrines. This will hopefully give us enough time to shake our pursuers and find a safe place to execute our plan without being detected. The trip will be several hours long since we're going by car instead of taking the train, and we might not stay in the first town if we think we are being trailed in order to throw them off. Ideally, we'll be back in Den City on Monday.”

Yusaku hums along to the explanation, crossing his arms more tightly. “And how will we deal with them eventually noticing we're not here?”

Ryoken has the decency to look a bit uncomfortable at the question, if not defensive. “They have several ways of reacting to us disappearing, which they’ll eventually notice through security cameras, and by then it’ll be too late. I locked them out of many of their tracking options when I left, and they clearly haven’t managed to recover them. Your equipment is good enough that we’ll be able to block any interference anyways.”

“We’re only going away because of the in-real-life threat. But shouldn’t you tell us how you’re planning to counter the stalking?” There’s no trace of aggressiveness in Yusaku’s voice, and Ryoken doesn’t seem to take offence in this comment, but Kusanagi-san awkwardly coughs a bit into his fist. This is another odd occurrence: usually, Yusaku is the one supporting Ryoken’s idea, no matter how frustrating he finds the fact that he doesn’t share details, but this time around he’s the one having his doubts about this part. The programs are frankly perfect, but he’s wary of a road trip. “They might react more aggressively than you think after losing their online resources.”

“There are too many available channels for them to make a move in Den City, but once we’re out of town...” Ryoken drifts off, taking a sip of his coffee, his nose scrunching up at the lack of milk in it. “I know how they think. If they follow us, then they won’t be able to protect themselves for an attack directly into Hanoi’s mainframe. If they don’t follow us, it means we might have to be prepared to force our way in, depending on their reaction time, though we already have access to the database. There’s the chance that they have started enlisting people offline too, to watch us, but we won’t know until we cross that bridge.”

Yusaku is about to open his mouth to point out how dangerous it would be for them to bring cyber terrorism into real life despite how many reassurances and back-up plans they have, but gets interrupted by Spectre knocking on the door of the truck. Ryoken is the one that gets up and welcomes him in, closing the door after him, and Spectre shoots both Yusaku and Kusanagi-san a grin that sends a shiver down his spine. He hasn’t gotten any less creepy, even dressed in more casual clothes of slacks and a button up and holding what Yusaku will assume are his and Ryoken’s travel bags.

“Good evening,” he says, dropping the bags on the floor and sitting on the one other extra chair that Kusanagi-san brought over. It’s quite cramped in the truck already, so Yusaku is not looking forward to this. “Are we ready to go?”

Spectre’s pale eyes seem to twinkle and dance, which only gives Yusaku more of the heebie jeebies, and without a word he grabs his bag and heads towards the door, not looking back at any of them. “I call shotgun.”

He notices Ryoken opening his mouth from the corner of his eye, but Yusaku doesn’t give him the chance to speak and steps out of the truck, going around the back as he patiently waits for Kusanagi-san to unlock the cabin’s doors. Kusanagi-san raises his eyebrows at Yusaku, signaling at the back of the truck as if to say ‘*what a pair*’, and Yusaku can’t help but agree, even if he thinks both Ryoken and Spectre are pretty capable individuals. *Especially* Ryoken. He has his doubts about Spectre’s mental state even months into knowing him.

They have proven to be resourceful ever since Revolver abandoned Hanoi. When Yusaku first got obviously tailed for a whole day by someone, Ryoken was glued to his back the next, picking him up at the school gates, walking him home, staying the night at his place, sleeping on his floor, and the day after that Spectre spent all afternoon lounging around Cafe Nagi while Ryoken ‘*figured out some things*’ regarding their surveillance. Yusaku was colored impressed when he came back from school to find a Taser gun sitting on his table, but he never questioned how or why. He had an idea anyways.

Right now, though, Kusanagi-san starts the truck and they start driving towards the outskirts of Den City at a mild, unsuspecting speed, the sun setting behind them and night falling quicker than Yusaku expected it to.

He doesn't talk much with Kusanagi-san, mostly out of boredom and not knowing how to keep up small talk that is not initiated by someone else. He eventually takes his school jacket off and uses it as a blanket when it starts to get a bit too cold for him, and watches the road in silence as they finally reach the highway.

It's not surprising that Yusaku finds himself dozing off and remembering the last argument he had with Ryoken not two days ago about what he was allowed and not allowed to do. Words Ryoken directed at him rang clear and intrusive in his mind — *'if I— if we lose you, then we lose everything and none of this even had a point'* — and while Yusaku could do without them, they were sobering, as well as truthful. Yusaku isn't used to being bossed around like this though, to be told to take care of himself and watch his back more closely than he already did. He is especially not used to having people spend the night sleeping on a thin futon on the floor of his shithole, or having his stuff packed for him for a trip he wasn't notified of. He doesn't know if what bothers him is that Ryoken pretends not to care or that he does care to the point of constantly berating him about how he treats himself, but either way it also makes him feel a bit warm, and a bit angry.

He told Ryoken to own up to it, last time. To stop driving Yusaku into dead ends when it came to *them*, but there was no response before Yusaku couldn't take the silence anymore and stormed out. A bit childish, perhaps, but the intensity of Ryoken's shocked eyes as well as the sudden realization of what he said were enough to embarrass him so much he needed to hightail it out of there.

Ryoken looks pretty no matter whether he's shocked or angry or neutral and that also served to make Yusaku stammer a bit when he first saw him after that fight. Oh, how low he's fallen, though he guesses that if it had to be anyone, it was going to be someone like Ryoken, like his voice of hope, someone good who wouldn't hesitate to put him in his place or back down when he tried to put them in their place, that cared so much to go as far as to claim Yusaku's safety is at the center of all this, even if that's only partially true and they both knew and accepted it was bigger than that.

Yusaku eventually drifts off into what he would call a semi-peaceful nap. It's not comfortable and a part of his consciousness seems to be nervous enough about the unknown location they're heading to that he keeps blinking his eyes awake what feels like every few seconds but could be hours, but beyond that it's a relatively good sleep, certainly more restful than usual, probably because of the companionship.

Yusaku doesn't truly wake until the smell of gasoline fills his lungs and the sounds of voices - some loud and others hushed - reach his ears. He finds himself feeling slightly nauseous and disoriented, and blinks a lot while looking around, trying to process that they're at a gas station, its pitch dark outside, and there's someone holding his hand, fingers intertwined.

He looks at his hand swallowing a yawn, half expecting it to just be Kusanagi-san trying not to be nervous about driving at this hour in their current situation or trying to keep him warm to avoid having to deal with him being sick, but instead he recognizes tanned gold skin and his mouth goes dry.

He follows the graceful curve of his wrist up to his arm, then his face, and finds him talking with someone outside — later, Yusaku would think back to this moment and recognize that this was just an employee — but after dismissing the person he turns, feeling as Yusaku straightens reflexively in his seat, tensing and meeting his eyes in a flash.

They say nothing for a few seconds, and then Yusaku yawns again, which makes Ryoken sigh.

"We didn't want to wake you when we exchanged shifts," he offers, his voice soft and extremely welcoming to his ears. "You'll need the rest for when we get to town."

Yusaku blinks at him, his brain a bit slow, but he eventually comes up with an answer. "Well, I don't have much of a sleeping schedule anyways."

Ryoken hums, nodding along in agreement, and not for the first time Yusaku notices the shadows under his eyes, the redness that creeps like spider webs over the white of them making them bloodshot. It doesn't make him look any less attractive, heaven forbid, but it does make Yusaku wonder how much Ryoken sleeps, or if he even does. Spectre sometimes jokes about late night work they keep doing to keep an eye on Hanoi when Yusaku and Kusanagi-san can't spend all day browsing the network with them, but he never knows how serious he is.

Something about how Ryoken looks right now tells him they were hardly jokes at all, and it makes Yusaku look at him for longer than he usually allows himself to do so, taking him in, staring at the way his hair is tousled and fluffy, making him want to run a hand through it, but he doesn't dare.

He is, however, blunt enough to address the hand holding.

"Was your hand cold?" He asks, and Ryoken seems confused for about three seconds before he remembers, his eyes never leaving Yusaku's face but his hand around his momentarily tightening. Clearly too dazed still to be smart about this, Yusaku's mouth opens again. "It's okay, I like it."

Ryoken seems to do a double take at that, shaking his head as if to make sure Yusaku actually said that, and he can't blame him—he wasn't exactly *planning* to reveal that, and the mortification creeps up on him and makes his cheeks heat up. Ryoken raises his eyebrows, seemingly at a loss, a dusting of pink, almost unnoticeable, appearing on top of his cheekbones and making him look even better, more alive.

Ryoken looks away from him without giving him an answer, which isn't unusual for him but also happens when reaching other topics that don't particularly include this one, like his father, and doesn't address him again until they're pulling out of the gas station after briefly letting go of hand, his eyes focused on the road rather than on him. Yusaku wishes he could look away from him for that long, like he seems to be able to do.

"You were whimpering in your sleep," Ryoken mumbles, so Yusaku doesn't catch it at first and almost asks him to repeat himself, until the words process and he stops. Ryoken still doesn't look at him. "It was really quiet and I almost didn't notice. I figured it was a nightmare but I couldn't wake you up. So I took your hand, and you settled down."

"Oh," Yusaku says, softly, looking away and trying hard not to blush. He squeezes Ryoken's hand tentatively, and focuses his eyes on his own panicked reflection in the window. "Thank you."

Ryoken doesn't answer, which is fine for a while, but then the panicked voice inside Yusaku's head gets louder and it's impossible for him to ignore

it and his curiosity at the same time, no matter how hard he tries.

"Isn't it weird," he starts, not sure if he has Ryoken's attention but not wanting to look at his face. "That you allow this but you won't... talk to me about the rest? About us?"

Silence, long and still, and Yusaku resigns himself to getting no answer when Ryoken suddenly speaks.

"I've told you, I'm..." Ryoken drifts off, a frustrated sigh leaving his lips. Suddenly, he looks more tired. "I can't do *this* right now."

Yusaku opens his mouth to complain about how Ryoken always does this, to ask *when* he could or if he could at least tell him the why of it, because if he were direct and explicit then Yusaku could give him a chance instead of just standing off to the side and collecting his frustration until it became too much and he questioned him about it again. It's happened too many times now, but Yusaku doesn't bother to challenge him in the end, feeling way too boneless to put up a fight right now. He considers letting go of Ryoken's hand in protest, because he took it again the second they were back on the road, but he quite likes to feel the warmth radiating from it, and soon enough the quietness of the space starts to lull him back to sleep.

"Ryoken?" He calls, half asleep, voice coming out small, and only gets an acknowledging grunt in response. "Why didn't any of you tell me about the trip?"

Ryoken sighs again, licking his lips, but he doesn't look particularly nervous; in fact, he is quick to respond, as if he was already expecting Yusaku to ask this. "You've been stressed out lately. I know you are not sleeping very well, knowing your apartment is bugged, and that it might be reminiscent of... other times. I thought I could help by taking some responsibility off your back, but I seemed to have miscalculated."

Yusaku stares at his profile, stunned by the answer. He would be angry about the fact that it seemed to be rehearsed if it wasn't so sincere. Yusaku still feels some shame and embarrassment over it, and the anger is still there, but it has calmed down somehow.

“Did you...” Yusaku starts, but bites his lip, not knowing if he really wants to know this. Ryoken shoots him a look out of the corner of his eye, curious, so Yusaku decides that maybe, for the sake of it, and to gauge Ryoken’s reaction, it won’t be as bad. “Did you go through everything? Pack... everything?”

Unexpectedly, some of the tension seems to leak out of Ryoken’s shoulders, and he nods. “Don’t worry about it, I packed everything I thought you might... need, or that might be essential. I’m sorry about invading your privacy like that.”

Yusaku wants to say it's fine; it truly isn't, but he appreciates the apology. “Thank you. Don’t do it again.”

“Noted.”

“Ryoken?” Yusaku yawns again, sleep approaching him once more, and he decides to take one more risk by asking another question. The only sign that Ryoken is still listening is the tilt of his head towards the sound of his voice. “Can we talk one day, about us? Can you promise?”

Yusaku's eyes drop closed with no struggle from him to keep them open, and he doesn't think he actually wants an answer to the questions he just made— but Ryoken gives him one anyways, and Yusaku very nearly misses it.

"I will," Ryoken's voice is solid, with no room for hesitation. He squeezes his hand around Yusaku softly, as if to give more weight to it. "I don't know when. I might... change my mind. But I will."

Yusaku hums, and then buries himself further inside his jacket before falling asleep again.

Waking up is awful.

He rises from what he could only call a deep slumber with a hand shaking his shoulder and Spectre's smirk pointed at him from outside the door, the

morning still dark but with traces of sunlight peeking through. They are parked at what seems to be a motel, small and with a little diner on the front of the building, the smell of food floating through the air. Yusaku spies Kusanagi-san and Ryoken talking with their heads close together, and raises an eyebrow as he sees Ryoken pull out his wallet from his back pocket and hand over some bills to Kusanagi-san.

Kusanagi-san seems to try to brush off whatever is happening, but Ryoken just keeps insisting until Kusanagi-san gives. It doesn't occur to Yusaku until he sees Kusanagi-san approaching the driver's seat to bury it inside the glove compartment that it might be the gas money, which makes very little sense unless Ryoken grabbed some cash from Kusanagi-san's stash.

Spectre doesn't try to hide the fact that he's staring at him staring at them, which bothers Yusaku, so he decides to fill the silence. "Are we staying the day?"

"No," Spectre grins at him, and Yusaku finally dignifies to step out of the car, leaving his jacket behind with a little hesitation. He doesn't want his uniform recognized, so he takes his tie off as well for good measure. "It's breakfast and then another thirty minutes before reaching the nearest town. I can smell the sea once more."

Yusaku realizes that yeah, there's a distinct sting of saltwater in the air that he usually only ever gets from visiting Stardust Road, but there's also a scent that can only be fish making him turn up his nose a bit, once he pays attention and takes a big whiff.

Yusaku isn't usually picky about food, unless he literally can't eat it, and he doesn't have a strong opinion on fish but the smell always sends his stomach into some unpleasant lurching. He has a feeling he's not going to like the fishing towns very much, and hopes they stay in one more tourist-oriented instead.

Other than that, Yusaku enjoys the momentary stop and finds himself hungrier than he thought he would be, practically inhaling his breakfast despite it still being decently modest so as to not upset his stomach. He makes the very conscious decision to sit in front of Spectre and next to

Kusanagi-san at the table while they eat, not making eye contact with Ryoken or really acknowledging him beyond what's necessary, their short conversation from last night coming back to him only after he sits to eat in the first place.

Yusaku understands him, despite his persistent anger towards him. He can't exactly imagine the level of emotional stress he's under right now, considering how many years he spent with his father and how he's changed his own path in such a rushed, probably painful manner, so Yusaku can tell that Ryoken probably isn't emotionally available enough to deal with a deeper relationship with him, either as friends or something else.

He wishes it weren't so, in a very selfish manner, but Yusaku brushes it off with a sigh and he chews the last bite of his food, staring down at the table. He's confident, considering how he's come to know and understand Ryoken better in the three months, that if he didn't push nearly as much as he does he would have lost Ryoken already, either to his newfound cause, to his father yet again, or to himself. Something about the way he carries himself is so strained, self-contained, that despite his iron will Yusaku knows that the vulnerability resting in Ryoken's heart could be easily swayed with the right influence, with the right offers.

He's careful not to toy with that line, that boundary. Pushing him to talk about it is different from trying to get Ryoken to make a choice in the moment, and while it still might not be fair, Yusaku feels like it's something they both need. If Ryoken opened up, were honest about his feelings with him and for him, then Yusaku would be more than perfectly happy with him taking his time, with prioritizing getting rid of the Knights of Hanoi and letting time and whatever happened from here to when they reach that goal decide when the right moment for them would come.

He's considered this before, in a much more childish way, but now that Ryoken's promised a talk sometime in the hopefully near future, Yusaku suddenly feels like he can step back and get off his case, at least for the remainder of their trip.

Unless he gets fucky, of course. Yusaku won't let him take three steps forwards and two backwards.

Spectre is the one that pays for their breakfast, but the glint of amusement in his eyes tells, as he looked at the sourness of Ryoken's face when he announced he would do it, that he's probably the only one Ryoken wouldn't pull aside later to try and pay him back. Because it was more than likely his own money. As Spectre walks over to the cashier, their bill in hand, Kusanagi-san excuses himself for a bathroom break, but not without first reminding them to do the same before they leave.

It leaves Ryoken and Yusaku alone together, and the second Kusanagi-san is out of earshot he watches how Ryoken's dead serious facade drops a little bit as he looks directly at Yusaku, purpose showing in his eyes, the usually sharp curl of his mouth softening.

"Did you sleep well?" He asks, his voice low and somehow making Yusaku feel like he's being wrapped up in cotton with its softness. It's clear that he's doing it to avoid someone eavesdropping on them, but there's barely anyone other than them in the diner and the employees are limited to two waitresses, the cashier, and the cook, but Yusaku doesn't mind. He's almost thankful for it, after weeks of watching Ryoken eagle-eyed and tense, and wonders if their little talk last night made him achieve some perspective as well, or at least a little peace.

"Well enough," Yusaku answers, reaching for his cup of coffee and taking a small sip, the drink still hot enough for him to be cautious. Ryoken watches with attention, as if they were playing poker or dueling and he was trying to figure out whether Yusaku's hand was good or not. It's clear by now that there's something he wants to say, so after another short pause, Yusaku decides to stop beating around the bush. "What is it?"

Ryoken's eyes almost seem to twinkle.

"I've been thinking," he starts, which makes Yusaku roll his eyes, because *when* is he not? Ryoken, to his credit, ignores his reaction altogether. "Is talking about feelings really that important to you?"

At this, Yusaku raises an eyebrow. "I know you are secretive and value privacy, and so do I, but you can't really expect me to believe you don't

ever express yourself, or that you don't want to clear things up with me. And you *did* promise last night."

"Don't you think actions speak louder than words?" Is Ryoken's rebuttal, and Yusaku himself has to bite back a sarcastic grin, to avoid it being too smug, his tongue peeking out to lick his lips before his teeth close in on it for a second, Ryoken's eyes following the movement with a certain laser-like focus that almost makes Yusaku blush. Fortunately, he gets it under control by looking away from him. Ryoken's face is truly criminal at times. "I think they can be far more effective at delivering a message."

"That's rich coming from someone who I recall being quite fond of speeches." Yusaku takes another sip of his coffee and Ryoken nods in acknowledgment, the shadow of a grin tugging at his lips. He lets it happen this time, and Yusaku has to swallow a sigh at the view. Ryoken smiling does things to him that shouldn't be allowed. "You're not backing down on your promise already, are you?"

"All of them were theatrics," Ryoken mumbles, the sound almost whispery, and Yusaku feels a shiver running down his spine at it. "Effective, but theatrical. It seems to work to make people follow you. And, I'm not backing down. Just... considering."

Yusaku shrugs, not exactly convinced he knows what Ryoken wants to achieve with this conversation. "You know I value honesty as well. I don't need you to be completely open right away. It's not my intention to force you to do anything."

At this, Ryoken licks his lips and looks away, humming like he's not completely supportive of that and yet agrees with it. "I just think it would be easier for us to just *do*, sometimes. Don't you?"

There are implications underneath his words that Yusaku doesn't want to examine too closely, lest he give himself false hopes. Still, the words make him pause with a frown, and he can't help but believe that Ryoken has either had a revelation or just lost his mind.

“What are you talking about?” He asks, starting to get suspicious of where Ryoken wants this to end up, and sees how he shuts down. Whatever comfort there was before fades away as he watches Ryoken suddenly enter an entirely different headspace. “Ryoken—”

“Just exploring the idea,” he interrupts, a bit too hurried. “I’m not trying to force you to do anything either.”

Yusaku’s about to point out there can be a balance between sharing and doing, and how he doesn’t think it wise for Ryoken’s current mindset to be affected by anything happening between them at a level as deep as Yusaku longs for unless he’s willing to be completely truthful and transparent about a lot of shit, but Kusanagi-san chooses that moment to come back, Spectre appearing shortly after, so Yusaku resigns himself to wondering about his half-baked conclusions as he heads into the bathroom.

Was Ryoken implying that they just throw aside communication for the sake of furthering their relationship, if it can even be called that? It certainly sounded like it, and Yusaku has to admit the idea is appealing. Having Ryoken all to himself without having to question it for one second seemed almost too perfect, too much like something that he would probably not recover from if something were to happen to either of them or if the decision to do it without clearing up their feelings ended up being what broke them apart.

He knows he would still take the risk . That selfish part of him is thrilled at the idea of it, of being able to touch and feel freely, and he knows that were Ryoken to initiate something he would jump into it in fear of never getting the chance to again. He is concerned about Ryoken somehow trying to use this as a coping mechanism, but his promise was honest, and Yusaku knows that if he didn’t *mean it*, if he didn’t intend to work on it somehow, he wouldn’t be making what’s almost an offer, or at the very least he wouldn’t be making any promises. He can’t deny there’s something there, to some extent, that’s pushing him to dip his toes into uncharted territory with him.

These sorts of thoughts plague him for the rest of the day, and he’s able to take no naps because of being reassigned to the back of the truck for the sake of Ryoken and Kusanagi-san discussing their route in the front. He

knows Spectre and Kusanagi-san, maybe even Ryoken, must have gotten some sleep at some point in the back, but Yusaku wasn't comfortable enough to sleep in Spectre's presence yet and his mind was too alert for him to really try anyways.

"Has Ryoken always been like this?" He finds himself asking, not sure if Spectre would answer him honestly. He's rewarded with an intrigued look at the question, the slight tilt of Spectre's head indicating he's thinking about it. Yusaku elaborates when he starts taking too long. "This difficult, I mean."

"You could hardly mean anything else, if I'm being honest," Spectre says, his tone amused, but a little sigh escapes him as he leans back on his chair, trying to get comfortable. "I don't think I have enough of a satisfying answer for you, though."

At this, Yusaku throws him an unimpressed look. "And that's why...?"

Spectre meets his eyes with no small amount of mirth behind them. "Well, he's never been in love before, as far as I recall, which is *quite* a lot."

The words have Yusaku reeling back, almost falling out of his own seat with the sudden shock of that statement. He huffs out a breath, his face heating with a violent blush, and to his absolute mortification, stammers a little bit once he finds his voice.

"You— uh, you can't know that." He's mumbling at best, and while he appreciates Spectre not outright laughing at his reaction, he also isn't fond of his amusement, of that little giggle he does and how his lips curl into a mischievous smirk. "You can't just *say* that."

Spectre shrugs as if relieving himself of any and all responsibility. "You didn't hear it from me."

With a groan, Yusaku turns away from him and buries his face in his hands. Fuck, what a mess of a day.

The second they arrive at their destination they divide themselves into two groups.

He expected Ryoken to go with Spectre, but he didn't think it wise to have the people who could recognize any other members of Hanoi in the same group. They park the truck in front of a small park. The start of a slightly humid summer breeze rustling the leaves of the trees surrounding them as they decide on their plan of action. Thankfully this town is far away enough from the docks that there are no stomach-turning smells in the air.

So, they go on recon. First, Ryoken guides him into the nearest place with a bathroom – a coffee shop that is *thrilled* to have tourists, so Yusaku buys a granola bar as a way to not feel bad about using the space – in order for him to change out of the rest of his uniform. It's the first chance he gets to look through everything Ryoken packed for him, and he's almost relieved to see his testosterone shots somehow made it, even if he doesn't really need a dose over the next few days because he had a strong one before leaving, as well as a little bit embarrassed about Ryoken having taken the care to pack both this and an extra binder.

Other than that, his bag is armed with a decent amount of clothing, toothpaste and his toothbrush. Yusaku chooses a white t-shirt and jeans before stepping out to the sight of Ryoken leaning on the shop counter, talking in husky tones with the waitress behind it. She's blushing under his attention and looking at him like a piece of candy.

"So you haven't seen any other tourists lately? That's a shame," Ryoken leans in even closer and the waitress actually seems to stop breathing, shaking her head. "There's such pretty views around here, after all."

Despite knowing that this is nothing but an attempt from Ryoken at collecting information about Hanoi maybe knowing about their location somehow, he can't help the annoyance rising up from his chest. He clears his throat and has to fight off a grin as the waitress jumps backwards as if caught red-handed. Ryoken turns his head to look at him with a raised eyebrow, a smirk slowly forming as he looks Yusaku up and down—and suddenly he's fighting off a blush as well, a pleasant warm running through his body.

Ryoken looks back to the waitress and shoots her a quick, charming smile, straightening up and cocking his head towards the door subtly while turning back towards Yusaku. He follows him out trying to make his heart relax, because there's nothing more jarring yet stimulating and exciting than seeing Ryoken act casual.

The smile drops from Ryoken's face as soon as they're out of the door, and Yusaku immediately misses it.

"I don't think we were followed," Ryoken claims, guiding Yusaku down the street like he actually knows where he's going. Yusaku wouldn't be surprised if he memorized a map. "We're going to get acquainted with the town, maybe find a hotel to sleep in, and then meet up with Spectre and Kusanagi-san back at the van to decide whether to stay or not."

"Was the flirting necessary?" Yusaku squints up at the sun, looking around town as they walk. It's nice, not too hot and not too humid either, and the semi-distant sounds of the sea are almost soothing. Ryoken side eyes him with a raised eyebrow, blue eyes flashing with only half hidden mirth because of it, and Yusaku feels the stupid urge to kiss him silly.

"People are more willing to talk when they're distracted," Ryoken shoots him a pointed gaze, and Yusaku pretends that he doesn't understand the underlined meaning of it. "Besides, we really need the information. It doesn't hurt anyone."

Yusaku resists the urge to pout and say that it might hurt *him*, or at the very least bother him, but Ryoken continues before he has the chance to say anything. "Besides, it's not like I'm interested in anyone else but you."

Yusaku almost trips over his own feet. "*What?*"

Ryoken smirks at him, his eyes gazing at him as if Yusaku is being particularly slow or obtuse, but doesn't offer an answer and just keeps on walking forwards. It's about midday probably, so they get to work on trying to suss out the town and its people; see if there's any risk that would make it not worth it to stay here, but the more they look the less reasons they find to leave. Even though it's bigger than what Ryoken and Kusanagi-san seemed

to have in mind. It's nothing compared to Den City, and its closeness to the sea makes the safe land available low, but there are beautiful landscapes and vast open areas that you won't see in Den City unless you visit Stardust Road or go hiking up the mountain.

The town is so surprisingly big, in fact, that after about four hours of getting acquainted with the place they somehow get lost.

It isn't that big a deal at first, nothing that asking the locals for directions back to the park they came from can't solve, but a storm unexpectedly starts brewing and they have no choice but to stand at a bus stop and hope that either a bus comes by or the rain doesn't actually fall. Five minutes later sees them standing under a downpour so strong Yusaku can barely see a few feet beyond the cascade of water.

"Well," Ryoken speaks up, crossing his arms and frowning. "Maybe I should have taken a look at the weather forecast before deciding we should go on foot."

Yusaku side-eyes him. "Yeah, maybe."

Ryoken turns his head to look at Yusaku, tearing his eyes away from the rain, and makes eye contact seemingly only to wink at him, because he's turning back around and sitting down on the rather worn down steel bench right at the edge of the roof of the bus stop.

Yusaku debates whether or not to sit with him, but he must admit he's rather nervous about the idea after what Ryoken said about being... interested. It's the closest he's come to an admission or a confession over the last few months. Their arguments from before laced with just enough implications to keep Yusaku hopeful and yet not enough to actually make him believe that what Ryoken felt was beyond guilt at any point. It's dangerous terrain, and their conversation back at the café flashes across Yusaku's mind, those rather cryptic words sending a shiver down his spine that's can't entirely blame on the rain, and his breath catches in his throat as he realizes what Ryoken was truly hinting at.

Well, Yusaku thinks, trying really hard not to blush and keeps his back to Ryoken, *at the very least he wants to fuck me.*

That's... certainly better than nothing. And something Yusaku does want really badly, more than he's willing to admit, but it's also not all he was hoping for. It would be foolish of him to flatter himself and immediately assume that sex could lead to feelings just because Ryoken doesn't hate him and seems to have gotten used to having him around and enjoy his company. But the thought, the *idea*, refuses to leave his brain and Yusaku refuses to indulge in it.

He can't be alone with Ryoken right now. He'll probably say or do something he'll regret, but just as Yusaku starts walking he hears the sound of the bench creaking with shifting weight and a hand wraps around his elbow, pulling him in.

"Where are you going?" Ryoken asks, sounding as surprised as Yusaku is at being stopped. His hair has started to curl because of the humidity in the air, making the white look even fluffier, so he looks away from it to focus on his eyes, caught off guard when he notices how the color has shifted into something more greyish with the reflection of the water against the pavement.

He takes perhaps too long to answer, but even then, or because of it, Ryoken doesn't let him go. Internally steeling himself and trying not to get distracted with how the weather is somehow ramping up Ryoken's beauty, Yusaku swallows and shrugs at him.

"There's no point in staying here. It could rain for hours." As if to hammer his words home, thunder echoes in the distance, making both of them turn towards the sound before looking back at each other. Yusaku continues. "We have no way to contact the others. We should try to follow the bus route and meet up at the truck."

"Alright, you have a point," Ryoken concedes, which also strikes Yusaku as incredibly odd, up until he opens his mouth again. "But you can't go alone. We are supposed to stick together. Even if the town's clear, we have to be

careful, and that includes not getting sick from walking in the rain for at least the half an hour it would take us to walk back.”

Yusaku’s eyebrows fly to his hairline. “And how do you know we’ll get sick?”

“I don’t think I would get sick, but you—”

“Have you looked at my medical records?” Yusaku interrupts, his voice raising slightly in volume, and Ryoken looks taken aback by this, even letting go of his elbow. A frown crinkles Yusaku’s eyebrows and drags the corner of his mouth down as annoyance slips into his voice. “You have, haven’t you? And several times, too, or maybe you have a copy—”

“What about it?” Ryoken crosses his arms, a frown on his own face, his shoulders squared. “I needed to have all the information I could get about the victims. Yours was actually the toughest to find, since you hid it so well.”

“*What about it?*” Yusaku repeats, his hands clenching into fists. “I expected you to have read them, but to reference them in front of me—do you have no respect for privacy? There’s a *reason* I hid them, Ryoken, *personal reasons* beyond the Hanoi Project. What makes you think they’re yours to read? Is this any better than going through my apartment at least twice and volunteering me for a trip I didn’t know about until yesterday?”

For a second, Ryoken’s hard expression falters, but the hesitation is gone as soon as it appeared, replaced with an even deeper frown and tone. “I can’t just ignore information that might be vital for our situation. I understand it’s not a proper thing to do but—”

“It’s necessary?” Yusaku finishes for him, and Ryoken’s lips thin into a line. “How many times are you going to use that excuse with me? Hiding things just makes everything more difficult, too. I would have let you do everything you did without my permission if you just asked and explained!”

“It’s not an excuse—”

“Yes, it is!” Yusaku turns away from him, walks towards the bench and holds back the urge to kick it, clenching his jaw before forcing it open again, looking at Ryoken’s eyes from over his shoulder. “It’s what you always say! We can’t be friends, because *apparently* that’s a distance that’s necessary to figure this out. We can’t spend time together because you’re busy, and we can’t even *talk about it*. You always say you can’t ‘*do this*’, and you can’t give me a single honest reason why—”

Yusaku takes a deep breath and shakes his head, clenching his fists even harder until his nails dig into his skin. Ryoken doesn’t answer; he stares with wide eyes, too stunned to immediately say something, so Yusaku turns away from him and sits down on the bench, burying his face in his hands, all heat and adrenaline suddenly gone, as if his energy supply got suddenly cut off.

“Forget it,” he mumbles, when Ryoken doesn’t make a sound or moves after several seconds. The rain seems to have quieted down at the face of his anger, but Yusaku can’t bring himself to care as the silence continues to grow. “We should focus on the mission.”

Eventually, Ryoken seems to realize he’s not frozen in time, and approaches slowly, reluctantly, until he’s standing in front of Yusaku. He hasn’t moved, because he honestly can’t look at him right now, all of the things Ryoken’s said and not said, done and not done, flashes through his mind and creates a conflicting picture. Too much of the good, too much of the bad, and Yusaku loves it all so much because it’s all Ryoken. It doesn’t mean he has to take his bullshit, but no straight answer and then suddenly today flipping his head upside down plus three months of falling for him are too much to give up on.

He expects Ryoken to wave it off, so Yusaku looks up, ready to suggest that they should get moving before the rain picks up again, when Ryoken drops to his knees, looking up at him with dead serious eyes.

Yusaku opens his mouth to protest, ask what the hell he thinks he’s doing, but Ryoken catches him off guard by grabbing his hands and bending his head to press them against his forehead. The gesture makes Yusaku blush from head to toe as his brain short-circuits.

“I’m sorry I’m like this,” Ryoken says, his voice as clear as his eyes, no stuttering, as sure of it as if he were talking about the Ignis algorithm. “I hold you in high regard, Fujiki Yusaku, but I have failed you several times before. I’m trying not to do it again.”

Mouth dry, Yusaku swallows, his eyes wide as Ryoken doesn’t raise his head. The moment stretches on, and the sight of him on his knees is so eerie that Yusaku’s actually weirded out, even as the words process and a warm feeling fills his veins.

“I meant what I said in the car, and I meant what I said this morning. I’m trying to reconcile my thoughts and I have been unfair in my attempts,” Ryoken continues, sighing and shaking his head. “I don’t mean to hurt you, ever, but I haven’t got a grip on it yet. I’ll do better. It’s just... I have a lot in my mind. You have been too patient.”

“Ryoken...” Yusaku drifts off quietly, blinking down at him, heart beating wildly as he struggles to find the right words, but he comes up short. “I... Ryoken, we’ll figure it out. Thank you—thank you for the apology.”

Ryoken’s head rises, their eyes meet, and he nods, somber yet determined. Yusaku stands up, but Ryoken doesn’t move and doesn’t let go of his hands until moments later, after bringing them to his lips and kissing his knuckles. “I intend to keep my promises.”

Yusaku doesn’t want to admit it, but he does anyways. “I... I hope so.”

The only thing he keeps to himself is how scared he is of that.

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

yeah i just spent all day working on an essay so i said fuck it, have your chapter XD hope you enjoy!

Walking back together is not awkward, but it is quieter than Yusaku feels comfortable with after what they shared. Kusanagi-san says nothing despite clearly having noticed their change in behavior, only raising an eyebrow while Spectre does that annoying smirk thing he's always doing.

Ryoken goes back to work like nobody's business. It's easy for Yusaku to get into it as well, to follow orders that he already expected to get for the next few days and sees no reason to question beyond improving the method they're using a bit. But once everything is set up in a nearby hotel room with the shittiest Wi-Fi Yusaku's seen in a long time, there's almost no difference from the nights Yusaku's spent investigating Hanoi with Kusanagi-san.

It's far easier to track them when you're confident they're not watching you from the other side, and not expecting the attack. Yusaku has to admit he probably would have never found the gate to their database without first having a clue about it, because Ryoken himself encrypted it under several layers of coding that *needed* to have multiple hands working on it in order to dismantle it without taking weeks.

Even if Yusaku would have found it and managed to dig enough to find their last remaining firewall, he wouldn't have been able to go any further, since the actual entry is made out of the Ignis algorithm. He's been trying to get Ryoken to teach him and he's learned a little, but this is something Ryoken sits at for approximately an hour by himself in order to not set off any alarms in the headquarters, on the third day. He brought Ai - or rather, his Duel Disk - in case they needed any additional help in an emergency. He brought the card with the password to the safe with him, but so far everything was going swimmingly.

“We shouldn’t let down our guard, especially if it appears to be going well,” Ryoken says, once he’s gotten the virus they have been spending the last three months programming to start uploading. “My father might be aware of this, even though his study of the Ignis algorithm was cut short. He is not human anymore, so he could know that we’re inside.”

“That’s one way to ruin the mood,” Kusanagi-san sighs, to which Ryoken only shrugs, as offensively realistic as ever. They do have a back-up plan for it, a virus that will infect Kogami’s consciousness and hopefully spread fast and far enough to wreck the whole system and give them a chance to finally call the police without there being Tower of Hanoi sized repercussions. Yusaku tries not to think about the fact that Ryoken programmed a virus that will essentially finish off his father on his own, but his gaze lingers. Ryoken doesn’t meet his eyes.

Spectre turns towards Yusaku and offers him the friendliest smile he has, which is still frankly terrifying. “Are you hungry, Fujiki-kun? The hotel has an open buffet tonight.”

Yusaku shrugs and steps out with him to eat, Kusanagi-san following shortly after while mumbling about how grim Ryoken is looking. It makes Yusaku antsy, that he didn’t decide to come down as well, but he can at least respect his decision.

“Ah, Kusanagi-san, I meant to mention this to you earlier, but I’ll be sharing with you tonight, for safety reasons,” Spectre speaks up, right when Kusanagi-san is taking a big gulp of coffee that, at the words, seems to go down the wrong pipe, making Yusaku have to pat his back to help him get the liquid stuck up his nose and the back of his throat out. “Oh my.”

“We are sharing?” He wheezes out, pointing between him and Spectre like he would rather die. He looks at Yusaku as if to seek personal support, but honestly, he is quite sick of sharing a bed with him, because he’s too tall and long-limbed and snores too loudly for Yusaku to grab some real shut-eye. Hell, he would even book his own room if he could afford it, just for the sake of having a whole bed for himself. There were no double bed rooms at this hotel. “Ugh, we’re *sharing*.”

“I’m quite a good roommate,” Spectre chuckles, shaking his head and taking a sip of some herbal tea that smells so strongly Yusaku will probably smell it on him tomorrow. It’s a disturbing sight. “You just need to ask Ryoken-sama about it.”

Kusanagi-san just glares as if he wanted to end his life, so Yusaku decides to chime in instead. “Where are we going after this, anyways? Back to Den City?”

“We’re going to pay a visit to a victim of the project nearby,” Spectre hums, and doesn’t show any reaction when Yusaku’s eyes widen or Kusanagi-san curses softly under his breath. “If everything goes well, of course. If not... Well, we have a few Taser guns, and we don’t want to bring bad company to that victim. He’s the only one not living in Den City as of this moment, so we might as well pay a visit. Ryoken-sama believes he’s been contacted by an Ignis.”

Yusaku has no response to that, other than quiet contempt and some surprise. He’s never thought about meeting other victims beyond Jin and Spectre (and Ryoken, in a way), because he rationalized the fact that not all of them were strong enough – or arguably, weak enough give in to the anger and longing for someone they don’t know – to do what he did. He likes to think at least one of them must be normal, *hopefully* more, and Yusaku doesn’t usually get along with people, never mind normal people.

He leaves Kusanagi-san to finish his meal with Spectre and head back to the room he’s apparently going to share with Ryoken. He goes right into the bathroom to change, sort himself out, take a few seconds to breathe in relief at finally taking off his binder, and steps out in his pajamas to stare at Ryoken until he turns around to acknowledge him.

He does a double take when he notices the pajamas and then turns back to the computer. “You can take the bed. I brought a futon with me, so I can just —”

“Just share it with me,” Yusaku frowns, crossing his arms, and Ryoken shoots him a look out of the corner of his eye, clearly not wanting to

indulge the idea. Yusaku rolls his eyes. “If you sleep on the floor I’m following you down.”

This does seem to capture his attention from the virus that’s most certainly almost completely uploaded. Probably already starting on the destruction process. It’s kind of underwhelming, how Hanoi is going to go down and thousands of accounts except for a select few are going to be deleted just like that, after ten years of waiting, but perhaps it’s for the best that it’s so... quiet.

It certainly feels kind of nice to not be dueling his heart out again.

“Fujiki,” Ryoken starts, then pauses to consider the situation as he meets Yusaku’s eyes, as if he knows this will turn into another argument he’s *probably* going to win. In the end Ryoken sighs and shrugs, turning back to the computer just as the virus finishes uploading. Before their eyes, the databases they just spent hours trying to access are selectively erased, but Yusaku knows Ryoken’s made a copy for himself of the essentials to show the police. “Well, now we wait. We’ll probably get a reaction. Any idea how you’re going to celebrate?”

Yusaku shrugs. “I don’t feel particularly victorious. Do you?”

“No.”

A look flashes over Ryoken’s eyes, almost mournful, and Yusaku wonders how this virus will affect his father. Deleting all of Hanoi’s database means deleting the servers where Kogami’s consciousness is stored, and while Yusaku doubts that there isn’t some kind of backup plan for it from Hanoi’s side, maybe even an old one left behind by Ryoken, there was no way the man wasn’t going to suffer from this.

It would make him smile if Ryoken weren’t trying to pretend he doesn’t care. There were years of Ryoken’s life behind all that Hanoi is – was – and while he doubts he regrets doing this, Yusaku also isn’t going to act like this isn’t like watching almost everything he dedicated his life to go down the drain.

“Let’s go to bed,” Yusaku says, his voice as soft as he can make it. Ryoken doesn’t move immediately, still staring at the screen, and a few seconds later he starts to turn off the equipment, leaving Hanoi to be wiped from existence. “We’re sharing it.”

Ryoken just nods again, disassembles his computer, and heads into the bathroom, but not without first bringing a hand to Yusaku’s shoulder and leaning into his space, making eye contact and drawing so close that Yusaku can count his eyelashes. There are too many to keep track of as he blinks, a sigh tickling over Yusaku’s lips.

“Listen, after this...” Ryoken pauses, licks his lips, and shakes his head. “I think you know what I want.”

Yusaku has an idea, yeah, but he’s terrified of it, and of how much he wants it, and how disappointed he would be if it happened and it wasn’t enough to fulfil the hole in his heart, or if it didn’t at all. A breathless ‘*yeah*’ escapes Yusaku’s lips, and he’s rushing to turn off the lights of the room except for the ones coming from the bedside tables as Ryoken walks into the bathroom with his bag.

He hides under the sheets and tries to calm his heartbeat, but it keeps thundering as he registers Ryoken coming out of the bathroom and sitting on the edge of the bed, Ryoken lifting the sheets and lying down and his arm brushes Yusaku’s back as the bed suddenly becomes barely big enough for two, despite this not feeling like it did with Kusanagi-san.

“Should I hold you?” Ryoken asks, voice dead serious, and Yusaku almost curses out loud. He gives no answer other than an attempt at an ‘*if you want to*’ that’s so mumbled he doesn’t think Ryoken heard him, but he scoots over anyways, slowly, as if giving him time to pull away.

Yusaku feels Ryoken’s breath against the back of his neck as he hesitantly scoots over closer and wraps an arm around his waist, pulling him against his chest. It makes his heart beat go wild, wilder than it already was from the tension of before, and he has to hold himself back from shivering because the feeling of something like this, so intimate and delicate, is

making his heart pound in time with some inconvenient arousal pooling in his belly, shooting through his body like electricity.

He doesn't think Ryoken notices his nervous inhale of breath, or at least he hopes so, but the feeling of him against his back, around him, sort of but not quite cuddling him, is making Yusaku a bit lightheaded. He swallows and bites his lip, Ryoken settling behind him none the wiser to the mental struggle against himself and his desires Yusaku. When he finally finds a comfortable position Yusaku feels awkward in the ensuing silence, tension that he isn't quite sure he's imagining making him hold his breath.

A few seconds pass without change, and then Ryoken huffs out a short laugh, his breath brushing his neck and ear and giving him goosebumps. "Is this all it takes to shut you up? I should have tried this before."

Yusaku blushes so deeply he's glad Ryoken can't see his face, because it would be mortifying. He wouldn't hear the end of it in a thousand years. Still, it makes something inside him tingle happily, and something about how close Ryoken is makes his voice huskier, and that— that's simply not fair, to be honest. He struggles to say something back, something that doesn't sound too horny or desperate, but in the end he just lets his tongue take over, hopeless.

"There's several other ways to keep me quiet," is his retort, and then he internally cringes as the double meaning processes in his brain. Ok, failed the part of not being horny. That's fine. Trying not to stutter, Yusaku continues: "Like not being an asshole and just doing what you're told."

"You think I like being bossed around?" Ryoken chuckles, his voice coming out so deep Yusaku feels his heart stop for a second. Ryoken shifts, tightening his arm around him, and Yusaku can almost see the smirk he must be wearing; perfect teeth barely hidden by pink lips and a curl to the end of his mouth that screamed of the devil. "I think you just like it when I pay attention to you."

Yusaku almost chokes on the quick, deep breath he takes, but he manages to cover it up with a cough, blushing even deeper. Ryoken's words are playful, yes, and this is nothing strange coming from him because he *is*, in fact, a

tease, but the context of their current situation makes him shiver. He isn't wrong, after all, and while he knows he shouldn't let himself be swept away like this he can't resist the temptation of playing along .

“What makes you think that?”

There's a pause, and then Ryoken's hand splays itself out against his stomach, pushing him back at the same time he presses his chest more firmly against his back. His heart almost beating out of his throat, Yusaku feels an echo of Ryoken's own heartbeat against his back and has to squeeze his eyes shut. When he speaks, Yusaku feels Ryoken's lips barely brushing the skin of his neck. “Your neck is red, and your heart is out of control, and you're trembling like a leaf whenever I move. It's flattering... but dangerous. I didn't exactly mean right now when I mentioned....”

Ryoken drifts off, but Yusaku knows exactly what he means. A normal reaction would have probably been to pale at being found out so easily, but arousal makes his brain fuzzy, so he finds himself following his lead, bringing his hand to rest over Ryoken's, licking his lips. “*You* don't sound unaffected. And your behavior is questionable at best, if you truly didn't mean it.”

“As always,” comes Ryoken's response, airy and light, and then he turns his hand to intertwine his fingers with his as if they did so every day and this wasn't a weird step in a direction Yusaku never thought possible. There's a sigh, and then Ryoken squeezes his hand and lets go of it, replacing the contact with the pressing of his knuckles against his side, as if he were giving him a massage, his shirt riding up a little with it and making heat flare in Yusaku's crotch, downwards; he can't help but twitch and fidget until he remembers Ryoken is so pressed up against him he probably can feel it all, but it's an odd feeling for his body to be this *alive*. “You're very sensitive.”

“You don't need to point it out,” Yusaku breathes out, a bit whiny because each second that passes results in another neuron in his brain dying, so he might as well roll with it. Ryoken chuckles again, and Yusaku actually leans back into him, feeling the sound vibrate, and Ryoken responds to it by dropping a kiss against his neck, long and tickling and warm, getting a little

sound of surprise to escape from his lips. Yusaku's voice comes as a warning. "Ryoken..."

"Yusaku," a pause, and then: "Let me make you feel good."

Something in his brain short circuits. Half of the reason being that Ryoken takes that moment to sneak his hand under his shirt, his hand pressing against the skin of his stomach with purpose, caressing him. The other half because of the implications of his words and touches. Yusaku fidgets again, but he doesn't get away. "Why?"

Ryoken sighs a little, presses another kiss against his neck, and Yusaku leans into it. "Because I've made you feel like shit for too long and I'm tired of it being like that. I did tell you we would talk, that I was trying to figure things out."

"This is not talking," Yusaku points out, his voice cracking when Ryoken *nibbles* on his neck.

"No, it's not," and, without much preamble, Ryoken's hand drifts downwards, fingers tracing the waistband of his pants. Yusaku sucks in a deep breath and holds it, not daring to move a muscle, but when Ryoken's lips trace his neck with what he can only call devotion and he considers how fast Ryoken's heart is beating against his back, Yusaku knows that he will be accepting this—because he wants it, and Ryoken wants it too. "But we can do that later, for real. I can't stand having you in my arms and knowing you want this. That I want this. Aren't you tired of pretending, Yusaku?"

There's no hesitation. "Yes."

Ryoken takes a deep breath. "Then let me take care of you. If you don't want to, I can understand—"

Yusaku interrupts him with a shaky yet unmistakable 'yes'.

The first press of Ryoken's fingers against his center, after sneaking his hand underneath his underwear, is almost shy, with a bit of curious

exploration that feels more like teasing to Yusaku. It makes his toes curl as Ryoken parts his lips open and coats his fingers in the wetness Yusaku's been ignoring between his legs this whole time, struggling not to squeeze his thighs together in response.

Then, when just one of Ryoken's fingers has gotten decently acquainted with a part of him Yusaku hasn't bothered to explore all that much by himself, he feels him sighing, almost as if relieved, right next to his ear, before pressing his finger right against his clit in a circular motion.

It feels a little weird in a way he wasn't expecting, but then the full motion goes through and Yusaku finds his mouth dropping open and his whole body tensing, his hips twitching. It's, quite literally, like Ryoken found a button he could push, and Yusaku isn't sure exactly *why* that zone is so tender and able to make him pant, holding back sounds with difficulty.

It was just a taste, and Yusaku wasn't going to underestimate it if a brush could feel like that. Then Ryoken starts rubbing, pressing his finger hard against it and managing not to let it slip much despite the wetness and the limiting space of their position, and it's like something comes alive inside Yusaku; heat taking over his body, his breath stuttering and a little whine going past his lips as his hips arch into it, trying to get more. It's so odd, almost too much too soon for his inexperienced body, but Ryoken keeps him on his toes by applying various types of pressure, experimental as he figures out what makes Yusaku shake the most.

Ryoken's breath is ragged against his ear, since at some point propped himself up on his elbow, and it's then that Yusaku realizes he's watching his own hand move under his pants under the light of the bedside table lamps. It makes him slightly embarrassed, but the thought of Ryoken wanting to watch him fall apart makes him hot, and even more wet, so Yusaku moans a little and squeezes his legs together for a second, grinding against Ryoken's hand.

"Fuck," he hears him say, and Yusaku tries to think of either something to say, but he's distracted by Ryoken pressing the rest of his front against his ass, and that—oh, he understands the jokes about being poked now, and he

would laugh nervously if the idea of Ryoken being hard for this, for him, didn't make him want to cry. "Yusaku..."

Ryoken's voice sounds a bit broken, then he adds another finger to the mix, letting them rub the whole expanse of his cunt and trapping his clit between them in a way that makes Yusaku mewl. His hips twitch again, rolling with the movements, and it makes him feel, right against his ass, how Ryoken's cock throbs and strains against his pants. It sends a trill down his spine and Yusaku arches his back, pressing himself against him as much as possible and letting the movements of his hips guide the grinding of his ass against Ryoken's cock.

Ryoken makes a strangled sound behind him, a deep groan from the back of his throat, and it makes Yusaku unbearably wet. Kisses are pressed to his neck, nibbles accompanying each of them. A hint of tongue making it a little bit wet, and oh so *maddening*; Yusaku doesn't think he can handle the feeling swelling inside him, like a rising tide or maybe a tsunami. The steady movements of Ryoken's fingers on him. The sound of his breath. The feeling of his heartbeat against his back and his cock against his ass. The already telling hints of their scent mixing because of how much they're sweating.

And god, he's so wet, he's never been this wet in his life, not even when he's woken up from vivid dreams of Ryoken having him and holding him close like this, it's a wonder Ryoken is able to keep the pace steady and work him up without slipping, what with that and his hips stuttering, desperately trying to meet him. It's not easy to let himself get swept away by that feeling, but the way Ryoken presses a kiss to his temple and pulls him even tighter against him, his crotch now actively grinding against him, make it all too much for him to even try to resist, and he's suddenly coming with a small cry, all his muscles clenching and his clit suddenly feeling way too sensitive, his body on fire.

He tries to pull away from Ryoken's fingers because it's making the feeling of falling last longer, prolonging it beyond what he thought possible until it's working him up again. Ryoken's fingers growing rougher and his mouth falling open with moans, louder than they should be considering the kind of place they're staying at but taking him away and away and away and

making him feel like he's floating until it becomes too intense again and he brings a hand to hold Ryoken's wrist still, panting, because he wants, he *wants*—

Yusaku sits up and turns around probably faster than Ryoken and even *he* could have expected, and without thinking he finds himself straddling him and grinding his cunt against his cock and slamming his lips against his. It hurts, because it's mostly teeth, but Ryoken reacts fast and grabs his waist, pulls him tight against him and takes over the kiss, slipping his tongue inside his mouth and making him feel like he might pass out if he stops.

It's desperate; they're grinding like their life depends on it and Yusaku couldn't care less about anything other than this. He takes his underwear and pants off like they're offending him, Ryoken helping him untangle himself, and Yusaku shivers as cool air hits his most sensitive parts, a little whine against Ryoken's lips escaping him. He feels Ryoken's hands on his bare ass, groping with long elegant fingers,. His mouth drifts down his jaw and teeth bite and suck at his neck, at all available skin that peaked out of the collar of his shirt, and it's good, really good; he could cry about how much he's wanted this, but there's a hunger running through his veins that's making him almost hurt from need.

His hands release his grip on Ryoken's hair and drift down, caressing his shoulders and lower, running over his chest that feels as firm as it looks. And then even lower, going under the waistband of his pants without hesitation, rubbing over his underwear. He doesn't know if he's doing it right, but Ryoken makes a sound like all the air was punched out of his lungs and his hips buck, jostling Yusaku's place on his lap, but the feeling of his hardness against his hand melts Yusaku to the purest form of lust he's ever felt and he echoes Ryoken's sounds with his own moans.

There's very little else in his mind beyond one thing right now. "Ryoken, I want you."

"You have me," he answers, his voice rough, hands squeezing his ass. "Fuck, you feel good under my hands."

There's an edge of possessiveness about it that has Yusaku biting his lip, fingers wrapping firmly around Ryoken's cock and making him let out a shaky breath as Ryoken moans underneath him, his hold on him growing so tight that Yusaku can almost feel the bruises already. He moves his hand slowly, almost experimental in his pace, until Ryoken leans forward to rest his forehead against his shoulder, lips tracing his skin and dropping hot kisses all over his neck and up his jaw, to his ear, in a way that has Yusaku shivering, the heat between them making him pant out his breaths.

Then, just as Yusaku's about to quicken his pace, Ryoken frees his possessive hold on his butt and goes to grab Yusaku's hips, pushing him away just enough to pull him back in a way that makes Yusaku's clit throb, a little whine escaping his lips at the suggestion of friction, of rubbing himself off on Ryoken's thigh. He takes the hint and keeps at it, not caring about how his own wetness is starting to smear all over Ryoken's thigh and making a mess of the skin between his legs, his hand speeds up on Ryoken's cock. It's sloppy yet good enough to make Ryoken whisper a broke '*fuck*' under his breath as more kisses and bites color his skin, wet and with just a hint of pain. He can almost picture it, how pink and red and purple his neck is going to be tomorrow morning; the thought only makes Yusaku grind harder, a little bit of frustration making itself known when the friction proves to not be enough to keep working him up.

Ryoken kisses him then, all but forcing his mouth apart with his tongue and biting at his lips with no reservations. It distracts Yusaku enough that his hand stops, his whole focus shifting as he tries to press his whole body into Ryoken's, trapping his cock between them in a way that has it rubbing at Yusaku's center, heat and fluids mixing and drawing a choked off gasp out of Yusaku right into Ryoken's lips.

The grip on his hips tightens, and then Ryoken is drawing back, allowing Yusaku to breathe, licking his lips and unsubtly staring at the mess he's made of him, from his hair to his neck to down at where they're so close yet so far. He's not expecting him to lay back after a look like that, keeping eye contact, and ignores Yusaku's little whine in order to find his discarded pillow and push it away, letting his head rest against the surface of the bed.

"Come sit here."

Ryoken doesn't know why, exactly, he's decided to pursue Yusaku today. He's been going over it in his head for a couple weeks now, after he first noticed that his lingering glances were being reciprocated, but he has a distinct feeling that he's jumped over a few steps that had him landing here, right now. He intends to keep his promises. Especially after realizing how much bullshitting he's done, because the knowledge that Hanoi might be gone and that time might start moving again has seemingly destroyed the wall he built for himself to collide against every time he wanted something for himself. But with Yusaku sitting on his lap, dripping wet all over his thigh and driving him insane with his scent and the feeling of his sweaty skin and his fingers and his lips, it's almost impossible to regret that he skipped their now practically scheduled talk for this.

Yusaku's expression of disbelief at his words is almost comical, the flush high on his cheeks and the pants leaving his lips making it apparent that he's riled up, still riding the high from the orgasm Ryoken tore from him with his fingers. His eyes shine with unshed tears, almost eerily bright because of how green their color is. He already looks fucked out, with his hair messy and his lips covered by a thin sheen of saliva, and the whole sight of him is making Ryoken spiral down into a mindset he's not entirely familiar with. Hot with intense lust and adrenaline and the inexplicable need to eat Yusaku up like a feast. It was somewhere between carnal and violent, and it was driving him mad to feel Yusaku's heat against his thighs, his cock, how wet he was, far more than earlier when Ryoken first dared to *touch*—

Fuck, he could barely resist practically manhandling Yusaku to hover over his face, carefully yet quickly guiding him so his shaking legs rested at either side of his face, and the sight *is—it's*—

“Fuck,” Ryoken mumbles, not caring if it comes out a little shaky, running his hands over Yusaku's thighs, watching him tremble with a deep sense of satisfaction that's firmly taking root somewhere in his chest; he almost wishes the lamplight was better so he could appreciate the full details of Yusaku's face looking down with wide eyes at him, could look up at his cunt and categorize all the pink into its different tones to memorize it for

later, so he could properly appreciate it as a whole, but this was amazing as well, this was making his mouth water and his face feel beyond hot, his breath coming in and out a bit quicker than before from sheer arousal. “Fuck, you look good.”

“Ryoken?” Yusaku asks, his voice drawing him out of his tranced state, and he immediately smirks when he realizes how much he’s started to squirm with the effort of keeping himself still, probably feeling Ryoken’s rapid breathing against his most delicate area. Ryoken looks at him with half-dropped eyelids and moves his head to lay a hot, wet kiss over his thigh, swallowing a moan at how Yusaku’s body twitches, his weight shifting, the sight of his cunt clenching sending a jolt right down to his cock that has him shivering. “Ah, Ryoken, *please*, are you going to—?”

“Yeah,” he says, a bit too quick for it to come across as calm or as if he’s in better control of himself than he is, but Yusaku just takes a deep breath and bites his lips, looking like he’s already on the verge of begging. And Ryoken would wait for it, keep him on edge until he opened up that pretty red mouth and started letting out the sounds Ryoken wanted to hear, the pleading words with none of Yusaku’s usual stoic filter, but he doesn’t have the patience for that right now. He makes eye contact with him as best as he can, biting at his thigh and sucking the skin into his mouth in order to leave a bruise, and Yusaku moans above him, his eyelids fluttering, body shivering. “Yeah, I’m going to take care of you, you look so fucking *good*, love.”

The pet name slips without much thought, but Ryoken doesn’t take it back nor does he regret it, because it makes Yusaku rock his hips with a whine. His body leaning forwards so his hands hold him up against the bed, bringing his flushed, warm, wet center even closer. “Yes, yes, please, *Ryoken*, do it, I want you—”

Running his hands over Yusaku’s thighs again, Ryoken slowly guides them up and grabs Yusaku’s ass, playfully poking his tongue out just to run it over his outer lips, not prepared for the way one of Yusaku’s hands goes for his hair and pulls, accompanied by a rather fitting little yelp that melts Ryoken’s bones with its cuteness. A bit of wetness that isn’t his own saliva covers his lips, and it’s enough to make Ryoken groan out loud, press his

tongue in further, opening up Yusaku's folds with it so he can get to his clit and slowly drag it over, trying to make it so Yusaku doesn't explode on him at the first touch.

His chin is immediately soaked but it's worth it, because Yusaku's hips start moving on their own accord, effectively grinding himself on Ryoken's tongue and lips until little whines reach his ears, each one getting a bit louder the longer he keeps at it and Yusaku starts keening. He can't help but to speed up, sucking lightly on Yusaku's clit and dragging his tongue over it roughly in order to create a contrast, sometimes switching it up by circling his clit and rubbing it insistently depending on what makes Yusaku's hips stutter and his moans louder.

He finds himself shifting the way he's sitting on him by lifting him just comfortably enough to sneak a hand underneath him and press a finger against his slit, feeling Yusaku's entrance pulsing to the rhythm of his heartbeat without pushing in as he focuses his whole attention on Yusaku's clit, trying not to lose his rhythm when he notices his body tensing, his hips speeding up and almost slamming against Ryoken's nose rather than his tongue from the strength of it.

Ryoken feels a bit lost in between the folds of Yusaku's cunt, like there couldn't possibly be a world outside of this, of Yusaku moaning up a storm above him and his face being this close to feeling and seeing him come. It's ridiculously easy to press one sole finger inside him up to the first knuckle just to see what reaction he gets – a loud helpless whimper that makes Ryoken painfully aware of his aching cock – and even easier to increase the intensity of his sucks until Yusaku's pulling at his hair so hard he's lifting his head at a rather uncomfortable yet productive angle. It allows Ryoken to put more pressure behind his movements until Yusaku's letting out a gasp and falling forwards as his remaining arm holding him up loses strength. His hips twitch and his cunt quivers around Ryoken's finger, overstimulation making him curse from above as Ryoken keeps going until he's actively feeling some resistance.

“Oh, shit, shit, Ryoken, *ahh*—” A few more gasps, followed by a small sob that makes Ryoken's hair stand on end, eyes opening to watch as Yusaku twitches, struggling to move away from Ryoken's hold keeping him in

place. His cheeks are flushed dark that the blush is bleeding down to his chest, matching the marks Ryoken left on his neck earlier, and his eyes are closed as if he couldn't handle the sight of himself being downright devoured anymore. It gives Ryoken an idea, and he's letting go of him before he can think much about it, running his hands up and down his thighs and hips and watching him twitch as his fingers trace his belly. It has his eyes snapping open with a little confused mewl. "Ah, what—?"

"Turn around," Ryoken snaps, harsher than he meant to be, but he's suddenly well aware of how hard he is and how long he's been like that, and he doesn't think he can handle it anymore.

"Turn around?" Yusaku repeats, confused and overwhelmed, his eyes wide and unfocused as his body still shivers from the orgasm, but follows his orders nonetheless, apparently willing to put up a fight. Ryoken likes his obedience perhaps a bit more than he should, but his next words almost make him choke. "Are you going to eat my ass as well? I heard guys are into that."

His voice is dazed, as if his mind went on vacation and he's just blindly chasing after more pleasure, the idea making intrusive thoughts about what Yusaku would be like with his cock up his cunt fill his mind. Ryoken actually lets out a little '*holy shit*' under his breath as Yusaku settles over him, still sitting, but he seems to catch the drift before Ryoken has a chance to explain, because he's leaning down to lay over him until his breath is ghosting over Ryoken's cock, going '*oh, fuck*' so softly Ryoken almost misses it. He's immediately bucking into it, and Yusaku moans, his tongue licking at his base and up to his tip and causing Ryoken to close his eyes and gasp.

He knows for a fact that he's not going to last long. Anything above five to ten minutes would be a huge stretch, especially with Yusaku mouthing his cock like that, sucking at his tip and wrapping his lips around him and sliding *down, his throat wrapping him—*

Ryoken buries his face right into Yusaku's slit in retaliation, as a way to keep himself from thrusting up and choking Yusaku on his cock, no matter how tempting the idea is. His tongue plunges right in, lips wrapping around

Yusaku's hole as he buries it as deep as it will go. The heat is overwhelming, it's tight for the broader part of his tongue, and Ryoken's face is already covered in slick, but he doesn't mind it one bit as Yusaku gasps loudly, his mouth leaving his cock and his hips twitching at the attention, his whole body shaking as Ryoken pulls back slightly to tickle his entrance with the tip of his tongue.

Yusaku's obviously sensitive, or maybe just as riled up as Ryoken feels, because he whimpers, the sound desperate and helpless, his back arching and pushing his bottom into Ryoken's face with eagerness, his hand coming up to grab loosely at his cock in an attempt to continue his task. Ryoken's leaking precum by this point, his own hands shaking from the need to come, but he finds it in him to delay it in order to latch his lips on Yusaku's clit again, his rhythm wavering when he feels Yusaku suck his tip back inside his mouth with fervor. He's sweating, has been for a while, and it makes his hands on Yusaku's skin slippery, their closeness successfully building up even more heat that makes it harder to breathe, but it's *wonderful*.

He takes a moment to breathe away from Yusaku's scent despite enjoying what he's doing; there's no particularly delicious or distinct taste to the slick Yusaku's body is producing, but the fact that it comes from him and that it's proof of his arousal is what keeps Ryoken hooked, a feeling of possessiveness surging from somewhere inside him that he wasn't expecting yet welcomes because he can't imagine ever letting this go. He's waited too long for this, has been playing a game of cat and mouse with Yusaku for too long. But he knows that the aggressiveness inside him won't fade away. That this dark, twisted feeling and need to have Yusaku shaking from pleasure under his hands won't ever go away, now that he's had a taste.

But he wants to feel the heat of Yusaku's walls around his fingers as well, so he brings his hand over, sneaking one arm from under Yusaku's leg to achieve a more comfortable position, and plunges in without much preamble with one finger, then two, watching them for a few seconds and how Yusaku rocks back against them quick and hard and desperate, with an air of fascination. It's filthy, makes Ryoken want to say a myriad of

inappropriate things, and his tongue is running away with his thoughts before he can stop it.

“You are such a *slut* for it, shit,” Ryoken groans, twisting his fingers and listening as Yusaku gags on his cock because of a rather sudden shiver and a gasp, followed closely by a tiny whine, and it all feels amazing for Ryoken, sends heat up his spine and has him letting out a low groan that affects the way his next words come out. “Seeing you spread out like this is so good, Yusaku. It’s so fucking *filthy*, you’re so much fun to ruin—”

He stops himself with a moan as Yusaku sucks his cock hard, the shaking of his body increasing as if he likes the way Ryoken is talking about him, and decides that he will exploit it later, if he gets a chance to, when Yusaku isn’t dripping all over his face and he can actually be sure he’s not breaking any boundaries with that kind of language.

It might not have been the best choice to offer sex during this trip, but like hell was he regretting it when he had Yusaku gradually deep-throating him and his fingers soaked and inside him like something out of one of his wet dreams. He would take a picture if the image weren’t already burning himself into his brain forever, and it’s with a shaky moan of his own that Ryoken bucks his hips upwards and lets go of the tension forming in his chest, in his crotch, that burning hot feeling of *now* taking over any restraint he has, and he’s coming up Yusaku’s throat, closing his eyes tightly and cursing as the feeling of Yusaku gasping and then *struggling* to swallow engulfs him.

His fingers twitch and stumble inside Yusaku as it happens, but when he recovers enough sense he’s swiftly wrapping his unoccupied arm all around Yusaku’s waist and pulling him towards him, so Ryoken can essentially bury his face between his legs even further, his tongue immediately going for a rather punishing, quick pace that actually has Yusaku cursing out loud in between moans, repeating Ryoken’s name like a prayer, trying to sit up in order to grind better. The second he starts twitching, Ryoken makes quick work of pressing a third finger inside him to look for a sweet spot to help him out, and he finds it faster than he thought, Yusaku’s body answering to his call and pulsing around him until he squeezes his legs and his head gets trapped between his thighs as he comes on his face again, with no choice

for him but to grab onto him and continue until Yusaku's shaking and sobbing with each lick, enough for Ryoken to decide he's probably done for the night.

Honestly, Ryoken wouldn't have minded choking a little for air during those few seconds, for it would be a sweeter death than he deserves, but Yusaku scrambles away once Ryoken loosens his grip as if he were wary of him attaching his mouth to his clit again, which is a fair fear.

Yusaku turns around as fast as he can, which is a sluggish pace, going back to straddling Ryoken's hips and grabbing him by the hair with shaking hands in an attempt to pull him up, but he's too weak and at best he just manages to make Ryoken wince at the pull. He sits up on his own accord and leans into his space to kiss him, not minding the mess of slick and saliva all over his face from his nose to his chin or how Yusaku has a bit of come on the corner of his mouth that must have slipped out.

It's a rather dirty kiss, with the way Ryoken sucks at his tongue and all but forces his mouth open to the point that Yusaku has to lean back in order to take a deep breath, yet he still returns the kiss with as much enthusiasm he can muster, which is impressive, because he's mush in Ryoken's arms. Shaky and so sensitive to touch still that Ryoken couldn't run a loving hand over his ass without Yusaku whining about it.

Surprisingly, Yusaku is the one that speaks first.

"You're so good," he says, and it's a long whine, pouty, a little bit desperate and so out character yet so honest it makes Ryoken chuckle and a deep affection he feels too exhausted to fight taking root in his chest, making him feel even warmer. "Ryoken, that was so *good*."

"Are you alright?" Ryoken asks, instead of acknowledging the rather flattering compliment, because Yusaku looks out of it, his eyes bright yet barely focused, his still chest heaving. He shakes his head as if to clear it, the racing heartbeat Ryoken can see thrumming at his pulse point slowing down, Yusaku's remaining energy depleting with speed. Ryoken brings a hand up to brush his hair away from his face, hoping to soothe him further, and Yusaku melts into the touch, his eyes looking at him as if he held the

moon in the sky. A lump forms in Ryoken's throat, an unfamiliar feeling that makes him feel lighter than ever covering his body, and longing getting the best of him. "It was really good. You were *amazing*, such a good boy."

He wants to say more, but he knows it would get inappropriate, Yusaku's little breathless whine at his words telling him he's too dazed to even properly hold a conversation and he—they need to talk about this, clear headed and well-rested. Ryoken's made such an effort to appear indifferent through so many arguments, through so many conversations in which Yusaku's questions were always valid yet he couldn't find it in himself to answer them, but he knows he can't do that anymore.

He was the one that took this step. It would be dishonest to take it back, not only for Yusaku, but himself.

Ryoken leans in and kisses Yusaku again, softly, and then convinces him to lay down on the dry part of the sheets and wait for him to get them a change of clothes and something to clean themselves with. He's exhausted as well, his legs unsteady, and he's convinced this is the hardest he's ever busted a nut in his life, for which he isn't complaining. He's glad the room, as empty and cheap as it is, at least has a walk-in bathroom with a small sink that runs only cold water, so Ryoken fetches one of the shirts he packed for himself from his bag and soaks it under the spray, squeezing the excess water out and going back into the room to run the fabric over Yusaku's forehead, his cheeks, his lips and neck. Yusaku had kept his shirt on, which is now dirty and sticky, but he decides to clean him up downstairs before asking him to change out of it.

Yusaku's so boneless during it that Ryoken thinks he's already asleep, but the second the shirt is pressed against one of his thighs he stirs, a hand coming up to grab Ryoken's wrist, a mumble leaving his lips. "'m fine. I can help."

Ryoken shakes his head even though Yusaku can't see it, because his eyes seem to be glued closed, but he just frees his wrist from his loose grip and goes about cleaning up his thighs and his center, resisting the urge to chuckle when the pressure on his most sensitive areas has Yusaku squirming away until Ryoken has to hold him still.

He's done with him faster than he thought he would be, since Yusaku stopped putting up a fight and drifted for a little while, so Ryoken takes the chance to pull the damp sheets from the bed from under him to throw them in the laundry basket in the room. After that, Ryoken decides to take care of his own mess and climbs into the small, horribly cramped shower to wash himself off, then lingering once he feels a bit more refreshed and less out of it, his mind drifting with memories from moments ago that unsurprisingly have him hardening again.

He wraps a hand around himself with a little sigh, leaning back against the wall and closing his eyes, shamelessly squeezing himself before slowly running his hand up and down, recalling the feeling of Yusaku's throat around his cock and cursing softly as he throbs. He swipes his thumb over his head and shivers, trying to take his time as he lets the memories from a few minutes ago guide him into a fantasy that has him panting, one of him pushing into the slick heat of Yusaku's cunt and burying himself to the hilt, that tightness clenching and quivering around him like a vice, Yusaku's little helpless whines music to his ears as he whispers obscenities in his ear

He's coming faster than he expected to, gasping sharply and spilling all over the floor, shivers running up and down his spine, eyes opening slightly to watch his cum wash down the drain, and he stands there for a few more minutes trying to regain his breath before stepping out, changing into a clean pair of underwear and nothing more, trying to be as quiet as possible as he pulls new sheets out of the closet, before he's approaching Yusaku and shaking him awake. He's disoriented and sleepy and *so fucking cute* Ryoken is sure his teeth are going to fall out, but he convinces him to go to the bathroom and freshen up, change into clean pajamas while Ryoken changes the sheets.

Yusaku takes longer than he expected in the bathroom and a part of him wonders if Yusaku's doing the same thing as he did, rubbing off another orgasm, but finds it unlikely in that dazed, fucked out state he's in. He's probably just exhausted and taking his time. And hopefully, for Ryoken, not regretting any of this, but he stands by his choice to talk about it in the morning when Yusaku comes out and immediately throws himself into

Ryoken's arms to be guided into the bed and tucked in under the sheets, holding on to Ryoken like a koala and refusing to let go of him, pretty much making Ryoken concede with only a little whine to cuddling with him and laying over him like a second blanket.

Yusaku's asleep within seconds, and Ryoken slowly relaxes again as he considers the sudden lightness in his chest. The sharp hurt over the first step towards Hanoi's demise seems to have been soothed and he's struggling to keep his eyes open. He wants to see this through and doesn't want to leave Yusaku behind, as he's known for a little while now that he's not going to be able to do so ever, not really. He just hopes Yusaku's willing to listen and understand what he's been trying to hide for three months.

He doesn't think he's come to terms with it yet. But laying a kiss over Yusaku's temple as his body struggles to stay awake, Ryoken allows himself to believe it'll be fine.

Yusaku wakes up sore, sticky, and tangled up in the bed sheets with a foot sticking out off the bed. He groans into his pillow as his body slowly comes to terms with reality, and it takes him about the same amount of time to remember why, exactly, he's even feeling like this. It summons a blush that spreads from his face down to the rest of his body, and actually makes him far more uncomfortable than he already was, but a giddy, small grin takes over anyways as the memories of Ryoken's hands on him, of his lips and his tongue on—

Yusaku buries his face in his pillow even further and has to refrain from screaming out loud. There's several messy, disorganized thoughts running through his brain, but mostly he can only think along the lines of '*fuck that was good*' and '*I hope this isn't a one-time thing*'. That would be depressing, not only because the culmination of all they've been holding back wouldn't even be a proper fuck like he's dreamed about, but also because he's really, *really* in love. *Painfully* so; the idea of rejection after knowing what it felt like to be wanted in such a carnal way by someone he is hopelessly in love with, making both fear and a striking feeling of hurt squeeze his heart.

Eventually, Yusaku finds the will to sit up and finds himself alone in the room. A little note left on the notepad on the bedside table beside him with Ryoken's handwriting informs him he went out and would be back later. It's a little disappointing, even though Yusaku realistically knew that they have priorities and that his fantasy of waking up in Ryoken's arms is still not a certainty.

He hops into the shower without daring to look at himself too closely in the bathroom mirror, but he still notices some telltale bruise marks over the skin of his thighs, of his hips, several on his shoulders, as he goes about washing himself. He tries to keep his mind blank, to not think of the very real possibility of Ryoken not wanting to even look at him after this, but ignoring that only leaves him to fixate on how good last night made him feel. His skin almost burns with it, in fact, as if Ryoken himself were touching him again, ghosting his fingers over the places where Yusaku feels the most sore, and he's tempted to reach down, use his fingers, get some suddenly much needed relief, but he doesn't out of some perhaps misplaced idea that he will at least be able to convince Ryoken to touch him again before rejecting him.

If he wants to reject him, that is. Yusaku's not sure how confident he should be of that.

Despite that, his shower is quick because the water is freezing, and he allows himself a few minutes to breathe and take in the sound of the rain over the shower. The quietness of having a moment to himself after spending several hours with company such as Spectre, and Ryoken's yo-yoing behavior, and Kusanagi-san's badly hidden mistrust of anything they're doing while being desperate to follow directions since the Tower of Hanoi fell for Jin's sake.

Fuck, he missed the quiet. And the accurate knowledge that he's not being watched. That he slept for a full night without being watched by his childhood captors again, or by their goons. It feels almost as good as knowing that, while they still have a lot to do, most of the fighting is over for him.

He steps out of the bathroom almost reluctantly after getting dressed, feeling like if he leaves it he'll be leaving a safe cocoon that will end up throwing him back into harsh reality, but he barely has a second to take in sight of the room before the door opens and Ryoken's steps through, closing the door quickly to avoid any rain from the open hallway getting in. Holding a bag and making eye contact with Yusaku, their eyes meeting as if they were meant to, something magnetic pulling them in, and it's that thought that makes Yusaku risk it.

"I brought you—"

Yusaku drops the towel he was using on his hair and all but launches himself at Ryoken, grabbing fistfuls of his shirt and bringing him down to press his lips against his, quick and rough, their teeth all but slamming together as one of Ryoken's arms wraps around his waist and pulls him in. Yusaku has to admit he has no idea whatsoever what he's doing, and is all too happy to just follow Ryoken's lead, but there's a fire that's been burning for hours inside of him and he can't waste time on just kissing right now.

It's why he pulls Ryoken backwards, where he thinks the bed is, but instead his back meets a wall and Ryoken's body crowds him against it; *this works too*, Yusaku thinks, hands tangling in Ryoken's hair as his lips trail down over the bruises he left on his neck last night, quick and soft and just this side of desperate that's already making Yusaku's toes curl.

"Where were you?" He gasps out, but only after noticing how many layers Ryoken's wearing. A coat, that he forces down his shoulders, a sweater that he tugs at until Ryoken takes it off himself, a tight long-sleeved blue shirt that brings out his eyes and makes the muscles of his arms and chest stand out stronger. He looks amazing, obviously, but Yusaku wants to touch his skin as badly as he wants his own touched, so that comes off as well. "Your note was too vague."

"Checking up on Spectre and Kusanagi-san," Ryoken's words are muffled against his neck, his face buried like he isn't particularly inclined to stand up straight again for this, his hands grabbing onto Yusaku's waist just under his shirt, thumbs teasing the skin and making him shiver at how cold his

hands are. “It’s still raining. I got you breakfast, went down to a convenience store to get some things. We should talk—”

“Did you get condoms?” Yusaku follows his words by sneaking his hands down Ryoken’s chest and tugging at his belt, and a choked-off sound leaves Ryoken’s lips. “You owe me for last night—”

“I owe you? How many times did you come, hm?” Ryoken takes a rough bite out of his neck, slipping his hands down and behind his thighs, pressing his body in until Yusaku can feel a bulge rapidly forming against his belly. “Was it *three*? Because how convenient—”

“I just want you to fuck me, *now*.” Yusaku leans in and kisses his mouth, hips rolling and a tiny moan slipping past his lips at the implication of heat. Ryoken chokes again, but this time he reciprocates, rolling his hips and openly groaning, his hands pulling slightly to get Yusaku to part his thighs open. “I’ve been waiting—”

“You’re not grateful, are you?” Ryoken shakes his head, squeezes Yusaku’s thighs as he opens his legs further at the little nudge of one of his feet against his, a smirk on his lips and this infuriatingly hot, semi-condescending tone over his voice. “I’ll have to teach you how to say please when I’m not already *tongue deep*, won’t I?”

A rather intense blush rises up Yusaku’s cheeks, and he struggles to glare at Ryoken with any heat that isn’t just lustful, but it’s a losing battle because another roll of his hips has him gasping and nodding, a part of him already surrendering.

“Yeah, maybe,” Yusaku forces out, but any other words on the matter die an early death when Ryoken pulls him close and lifts him off the ground, his legs scrambling to wrap around his waist, arms around his shoulders. A little yelps slips out as it happens, caught off guard, but it turns into a moan as Ryoken uses the wall and his body weight as leverage to free his hand and sneak one between their bodies, slipping down Yusaku’s baggy underwear and two fingers pressing up against his clit, barely moving in soft, tiny circles yet anticipation making a tingle go down his spine.

If Yusaku had wriggle space or didn't depend mostly on his legs around Ryoken in order to not fall off, he would be rolling his hips with it, but as it is he can only take it and cling tighter to Ryoken, letting his nails sink into skin as the fingers speed up gradually and work him up entirely too easily. He finds himself taking the risk to let go of him with one hand in order to grab and stop his wrist, the way his body keeps twitching telling him that he's not going to last, and he really wants to move on to the main event.

"Ryoken, you got condoms, right?" Slips out of his mouth, no shame left over what he's asking. Ryoken only nods a bit frantically in response, running his eyes over Yusaku's face, taking in the sight of him openly begging for it. "Can you—?"

"Yes." Ryoken leans in, kisses Yusaku's mouth open, and shifts around in order to pull a condom from his back pocket, the sound of his belt dropping to the ground and the feeling of his cock being freed from his pants coming shortly after. Ryoken nibbles and sucks at Yusaku's bottom lip, while he reaches out blindly to wrap a hand around Ryoken's cock, moaning quietly into the kiss before he's being ushered away from it and he's grabbing onto his hair instead. "We should probably talk about this, though—"

"Later, shut up," Yusaku snaps, rolling his hips, and barely notices the little snort Ryoken lets out.

Ryoken takes off Yusaku's underwear with some difficulty because he refuses to let go of him, considering that he knows he won't be able to stand right now. There's a few seconds in-between, in which Ryoken buries his face in Yusaku's neck without moving after putting on the condom, like he's savoring the moment, and it almost brings him to tears right then and there.

He can't exactly describe how it feels when Ryoken's fingers him open and the head of his dick breaches his hole, but it makes him tense up, drag his nails over his naked back and shut his eyes tightly because no, it doesn't *hurt*, not *quite*, but the drag is new and a little scary and the feeling of being filled is too good for him to keep his body from squirming, even if it's not as stimulating as having Ryoken's tongue on his clit. Being penetrated feels like it takes an insanely long time, or maybe Yusaku just feels like that

because he's too new to it and still too sensitive from last night, and too excited to process that this is happening at all.

Ryoken bottoms out as deep as he can at this angle with a broken moan, curses spilling from his lips as Yusaku clenches and loosens up while he adjusts to it, hands coming to grip Yusaku's thighs and cheek resting against Yusaku's temple.

"I'm not going to last long," Ryoken chokes out, his breath heavy, and Yusaku nods, knowing that like this, he's not going to make it too far either. He pulls back in an experimental shallow thrust, and their moans come out simultaneously as Ryoken buries himself back in, slowly setting a pace that gradually grows faster, until Yusaku feels the wall abusing his shoulder blades.

Steady, low bumping sounds come with every thrust against the wall, enveloping him in the experience until his mouth drops open with little whimpers, his hips struggling to roll against Ryoken because now that's he gotten used to it it's *good*. He wouldn't mind having Ryoken doing him like this every day if he got the chance, and it's only made better by how Ryoken grabs onto him so tight, how his hips sometimes jerk out of rhythm and moans seem to force themselves out of his throat.

Yusaku gets lost in it, not caring if someone on the other side of the wall can hear, or if Kusanagi-san and Spectre find out about this, or if Hanoi comes knocking down their door. He only cares about his erratic heartbeat, the heat and sweat forming between them, the rise and fall of Ryoken's chest with his quick breaths.

It's entirely too easy to get back to that point again, just close enough to the edge that he can almost savor it, his body tensing up and taking Ryoken in with a tighter fit that seems to knock the breath out of him for a few seconds before he's bringing one of the hands on his thighs back to Yusaku's clit, the double stimulation proving to make Yusaku throw his head back against the wall and hitting it with a rather loud, high pitched moan.

Ryoken's fingers are clumsy because of how he keeps stuffing himself back inside him, not stopping for one second even when his hips seem to lose rhythm and just slam into him mindlessly, but it's good, it's great, it's all he wanted and yet not enough, because Yusaku isn't sure how he'll live with this memory if Ryoken walks out of his life after this trip is over.

A sob slips out of his lips, and he covers the rest with a hand over his mouth. Ryoken notices and moves his head, kisses his temple and leans in closer, moving his fingers in tighter circles that have Yusaku twitching helplessly.

"It's alright, Yusaku," he says, voice rough and tense with arousal yet sweet, his tone nothing but alluring. "It's alright, you can come. I want you to."

Yusaku shakes his head and clenches, squeezing his eyes shut, but it's too much already, and even if his mind doesn't want to let go of this his body does, with whimpers hidden behind his hand as Ryoken keeps his fingers locked onto his clit and his cock sliding in and out hard enough that Yusaku can tell he'll be even more sore than he already was later, light exploding behind his closed eyes.

Ryoken doesn't come quite yet, and he seems to want to draw back when Yusaku's body twitches so hard with overstimulation he's almost jumping, but he keeps him there, sinks his nails on his shoulders again and whispers for him to *do it*, encourages him because he wants him to, he doesn't want Ryoken to feel unsatisfied by any of this.

He comes with a groan that sounds more akin to a growl, right next to his ear and with his pace slowing down, almost as if he's trying to bury himself even deeper but can't. Yusaku doesn't feel much but the twitching of Ryoken's cock inside him and an increase in heat because of the condom, but it makes him happy anyways, has him kissing Ryoken's face even as his body protests by reminding him of how numb his legs are getting, how raw his shoulders feel and how sensitive his skin is.

"Yusaku," Ryoken calls, voice shredded to pieces because of how he's still coming down, his body weight crushing him against the wall being the only

reason they're still upwards. "Yusaku, do you like me? I like you."

His heart drops. "*What?*"

Ryoken tenses up in a way that would be unnoticeable if they weren't pressed together like this, and his words come out rushed, shaky and *embarrassed* even. "Never mind, do you need to—"

"What did you just say?" Yusaku demands, adrenaline suddenly pumping back through his veins pumping him with energy, and he grabs Ryoken's face, forcing him to meet his eyes. He finds a barely distinguishable blush, though that might be from sex, but the way he struggles to lock his still blown eyes with his gives him away. "Ryoken, what did you just say?"

The corners of Ryoken's mouth curl downwards, somehow giving him the appearance of a kicked puppy despite the fact that he still has his cock up Yusaku's pussy.

"I like you," he repeats, and Yusaku's heart seems to restart itself, with the way it drops again before jumping, going as fast as a rabbit's. He looks almost grumpy saying it like this, but there's a flicker of doubt in his eyes, or insecurity that Yusaku can't remember ever seeing on him before. How well does this guy *hide* feelings? "I tried to talk about it but you weren't having it, with how you jumped me. I put you through a lot of... waiting, while I figured it out, but yesterday, after I ran the program, I realized I was... putting it off for nothing."

Yusaku's mouth opens and closes in lost confusion. "So you decided to fuck me just to be sure, is that it?"

Ryoken chokes on his tongue. "What? No, I did that because I wanted to make you feel good. I couldn't get it out of my head, I told you I wasn't expecting it to be... right then and there. I've been thinking about it during the entire trip and I kept trying to flirt with you but you wanted to talk about *feelings*—"

"And you're allergic to that." Yusaku's voice fills with disbelief, and Ryoken just shrugs as if to say '*maybe*'. He stares at him for a few seconds,

and then has to bite down a grin, close his eyes and shake his head because of course. Of course Ryoken would have a leg up on properly confessing, too. “Fuck, I love you.”

Opening his eyes, Yusaku sees the cogs turn in Ryoken’s brain as he processes that, and then, quietly, he goes ‘*shit*’. “I have a lot to make up for, don’t I?”

Yusaku leans in and kisses him, soft and searching, and almost wants to scream at how Ryoken leans into it, reciprocates the kiss so deeply and without question that his heart melts.

He thinks of the now hopefully gone Hanoi servers, of the probably dying Kogami Kiyoshi, of the months of surveillance and wondering about Ryoken’s plans for the future beyond this mission and his actions, wondering about his thoughts, how much he actually cared despite how claimed not to, of the arguments regarding it.

“Is this what’s made you secretive? And an asshole? All of Hanoi and... your father?”

Ryoken’s face tightens up ever so slightly, but he nods without much hesitation. Before he speaks, though, he slips out of Yusaku, holds him tight and carries him over to the bed, laying him down and kissing the side of his nose, and his cheeks, and his jaw, taking a couple minutes to go into the bathroom to dump the condom and clean up slightly before coming back and speaking up.

It’s like a dam’s been opened.

“Yeah. I couldn’t... you know I couldn’t just start to move on from that. I was lied to, which is what I never told you or Kusanagi-san. All this time, I thought ‘*he’s right, he has to be right, how could he be wrong?*’” A pause, then Ryoken sighs and buries his face into Yusaku’s neck. “He was doing everything because of some stupid, almost baseless simulations on the future of the Ignis. I couldn’t forgive him, Yusaku. He hurt so many people beyond those kids. Beyond you. He made me hurt people as well, and I did it because I thought he was right. I thought about calling the police right

then and there, because his heart won't be able to hold up for much longer, but I didn't."

Yusaku says nothing, a tightness wrapping around his heart, and runs his hands over Ryoken's hair, his scratched back, feeling tears prickling at his eyes. Ryoken takes a deep breath and leans into the comfort, shaking his head.

"I'm sorry I took it all out on you, and everyone else. I wasn't cooperative enough and I know how I was acting. I just didn't..."

"You didn't want to think of it," Yusaku finishes for him, closing his eyes. "You didn't want anyone to see you feeling like you were used for all these years."

Ryoken's nods against his neck, and Yusaku grabs his face again, brings him up to eye level and kisses him again, and again, several times more because he wants him to feel what he's feeling, how much he loves him, and it's—it's a lot. Yusaku doesn't know what he means by simulations, he doesn't know what he means about being lied to, but he thinks he can unpack it, with time. That Ryoken can make up for a couple of months of radio silence and will probably feel guilty about it for a long time before he lets go of it and truly moves on.

But for now...

"I get it, Ryoken. We can work on it." Yusaku pauses, kisses him again, and manages to shoot him a little smile that gets those blue eyes wet. He tries to hide it, but Yusaku can see through it right now, and holds him tighter. "I love you."

The first tear falls, and it isn't only from Ryoken's eyes.

Ryoken gives him the full explanation later, when they aren't naked and Yusaku's found something to cover his neck with. The hotel's dining room isn't very big, and goes out to the parking lot through one side, and is deserted other than the four of them. The food itself isn't that bad, but the

room smells of humidity because of the storm and there's an old fan hanging from one corner that's hitting Yusaku right in the face with air. Not the worst place he's been to, for sure, but next time Ryoken should at least look up hotels with *decent* reviews.

Kusanagi-san gives him a strange look when he sees him, as if he knows something's up, and Yusaku offers no explanation as to why they took so long to meet up with them. Neither does Ryoken when Spectre smirks at him, but they both focus on Ryoken as he explains the truth behind his father's reasoning for destroying the Ignis.

"Your father failed as a scientist beyond the human rights violations." Yusaku shakes his head, and Ryoken shrugs, nodding almost hesitantly. Spectre doesn't seem surprised by *all* of this information, but he's also particularly tense, as if Ryoken's secret-keeping had him on edge as well. Yusaku's watched them act as a unit for a while now, and he's still amazed at how they treat each other like family. It's the only reason why he doesn't write Spectre off completely. "He ran simulations that weren't even considering every factor and didn't bother to repeat the process to look for any potential major cause, and he didn't even consider each Ignis by themselves. It's no wonder he wanted to destroy them so badly."

"Well, he was always reactive. He didn't even finish the ones he started because SOL got him with the virus then. His results and actions were biased," Ryoken pauses and looks at his cup of tea before grabbing a pack of sugar and pouring it into it. A sigh tears itself from his chest, and Spectre brings up a reassuring hand to grip his shoulder. "The simulations I ran myself weren't great either. I was short on time, but we need to consider the Ignis as a threat to *themselves* as well, and shouldn't stop looking for them. They might be... an incredible advancement in technology and the limitation of human creations, but they are still a first generation that might have certain code unfamiliar even to myself. The means they were created through and the way my father groomed them for a couple years couldn't have done them favors, either."

"Is that why we're going for the other kid?" Kusanagi-san asks, sipping on the strawberry milkshake he ordered, leaning his face on his propped up hand. He doesn't seem to be in such a bad mood now, probably decently

soothed now that Hanoi seemed to be too broken to properly reassemble and he's been given his phone back, battery, SIM card and all, because they're relatively out of danger. Kogami Kiyoshi's status is unknown without heading to Ryoken's home, and they have other things to do first. "Spectre did say you thought he has an Ignis."

"They are inclined by instinct to look for their origins, if not for emotional fulfillment and growth, then for research," Ryoken shoots Yusaku a look, raising an eyebrow. "The Dark Ignis watched you for several years for sure."

Yusaku's eyebrows furrow at the reminder that Ai's been locked up for three months now, with only a few breaks of a couple of days in between. He understands it's for safety, but the idea that Ai is '*dreaming*,' as he claimed, is rather... worrying, and says a lot about the potential of the Ignis. "When can I let him out?"

Ryoken shrugs. "Today, if you want. We'll need him to contact the other Ignis. I could leave messages for them myself online, but another thing concerns me..."

Spectre raises an eyebrow. "Something you kept to yourself, I'm guessing?"

"Yeah, I'm sorry about that," Ryoken winces, and Yusaku meets his eyes with a raised eyebrow. '*You were being dumb fuck*' almost slipping from his lips. His expression suddenly becomes grim though, and Kusanagi-san tenses up slightly. By the time Ryoken speaks, tension has managed to make its way to Yusaku's shoulders. "The Cyberse's location was locked down by your Ignis when Hanoi attacked five years ago. Because of the programs we designed to trap them, they couldn't have left without him disclosing it, even if only to himself."

Ryoken pauses, almost unsure of what he's going to say next, but dread fills Yusaku's stomach, and Kusanagi-san seems about ready to bolt beside him. It's a gut feeling, the expectation of bad news, because everything always seems to escalate and Yusaku's relieved in a way that he isn't the only one thinking this is starting to sound really bad.

“It shouldn’t be possible for an Ignis to make contact with any victim because of that. I don’t know how but... they have to have found a way around all that and left, or at least one of them did.”

“How?” Kusanagi-san asks, and Yusaku catches the slight shaking of his voice, worst case scenarios probably popping up in his brain. “If the Cyberse’s locked up still...”

Ryoken’s eyes, that Yusaku has gotten used to seeing them act as a protective wall of information, are open for once, genuinely frustrated at not knowing anything concrete evidently bothering him. “They could have only done so from the inside, which means that there’s probably an Ignis that’s aware enough of everything that’s been going on with Ai in order to take their chance and... open it up to the network without anyone noticing it. How they managed this, I have no idea. The only option would be an emergency protocol of some kind that they designed, but I know nothing of anything like that being developed with the Ignis algorithm. If it’s hidden it’s probably right under our noses and we just don’t see it.”

“Well, maybe we can ask Ai about—” As if on cue, Kusanagi-san’s phone rings, the number on screen flashing with the name of Jin’s care home, and he excuses himself quietly, not finishing his sentence.

“I agree with Kusanagi-san, Ryoken-sama, but I’m not sure what you want to imply with all of this,” Spectre comments, as genuinely confused as Yusaku’s ever seen him, and he’s inclined to agree. “Isn’t it a good thing if the Ignis freed themselves and haven’t been caught by anyone?”

Ryoken makes eye contact with Spectre for a few seconds, his expression twisting into something torn, that sends alarms bells blaring in Yusaku’s head. “I’m not too confident in the simulations I ran, but some of them concern me. When I looked at each Ignis’ development, there was an outlier with lacking evolution, and with Link VRAINS somehow reopening today with barely any Data Material to work with and the semi-active tower, I’m worried about—”

Ryoken’s interrupted by the sound of the hotel’s doors leading up to the parking lot slamming open then closed, and they turn towards the sound just

in time to watch Kusanagi-san run towards the hotdog truck in a hurry. Yusaku gets up from his seat with alarm, and Ryoken reacts further by running after him, Spectre hanging back and putting a hand on Yusaku's shoulder, shaking him as he stares at Kusanagi-san yelling at Ryoken from the inside still, frozen on the spot, as Ryoken seems to try and argue with deaf ears as Kusanagi-san gets inside the truck—and drives away.

“Fujiki-kun?” Spectre calls, his voice genuinely concerned, and Yusaku turns towards him as if in a trance, feeling numb. “You are pale. Are you alright? You should sit down—”

“Something's wrong with Jin,” Yusaku whispers, shaking his head, horror slowly dawning on him as Ryoken's words echo in his head. Yusaku turns away from Spectre and runs back to his room, glad that Ai is safe, that he took his Duel Disk with him out of the truck, that his deck was in it because he refused to use it without Ai with him.

He's going to need it.

Notes for the Chapter:

[laughs in sin and evil]

Author's Note:

no im no ashamed of the amount of filth that's to come, thank you for reading. feel free to drop a comment and i hope you enjoyed!